CEPT
UNIVERSITY

W25FA020

Climatic and Social Narratives of Place

– From Colonial Histories to Tropical Modernism

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TA: Kaustubh Sreevathsan

INTRODUCTION

This course will take students on an immersive experience exploring the historical and contemporary expressions of architecture in Sri Lanka. With a rich cultural and religious heritage, colonial past and legacy of post-colonial revival, Sri Lanka boasts a diversity of architectural sites imbued with layered histories and reflecting distinctive design responses and expression. Over the course of our trip, we will trace the historical development of architecture in Sri Lanka from the ancient, to the colonial and post-colonial periods to uncover climatic and social continuities and ruptures between the different eras.

We will visit historical and religious sites in Dambulla and Anuradhapura, explore the colonial heritage of Colombo and Galle, and conclude our journey with a deeper understanding of contemporary architecture exemplified by the 'Tropical Modernist' movement, whose practitioners have re-imagined modernist approaches to work with the nature and lush landscapes of the Sri Lankan context. Students will be encouraged to reflect deeply on 'stories of place', and take a situated approach through modes of documentation and interpretation, such as photography, video, soundscape

01 House No.11
02 The Gallery Café
03 Seema Malaka temple
04 Gangaramaya Temple
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06 Dunes, Unawatuna
07 Sigiriya
08 Dambulla cave temples
09 Anuradhapura
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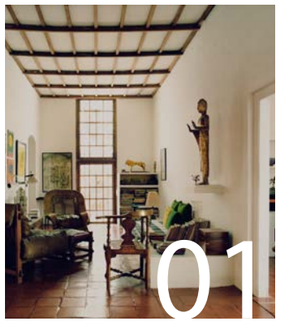
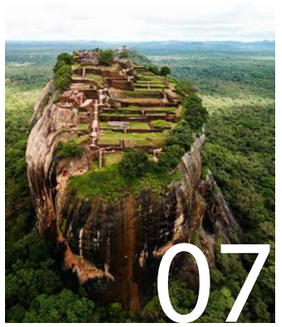
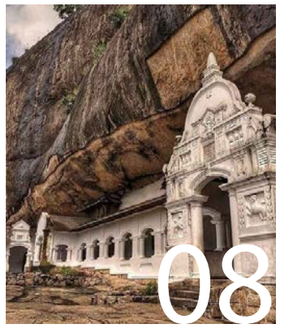
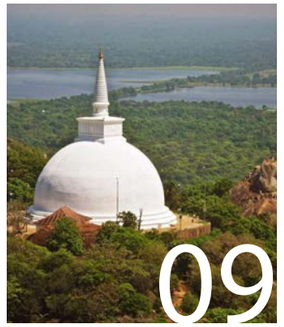
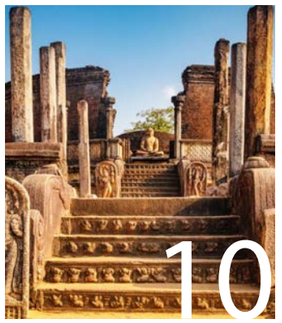
11 Heritance Kandalama
12 Lunuganga
13 Bevis Bawa's Brief Gardens
14 Jetwing Lighthouse
15 Galle Fort

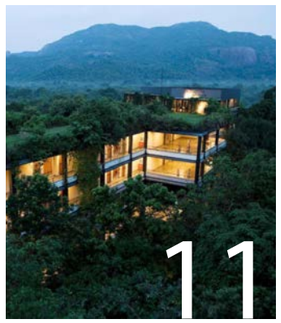


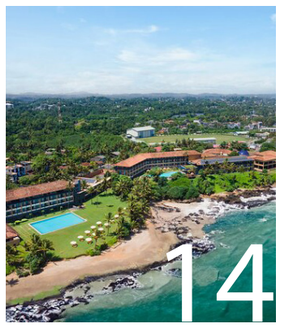






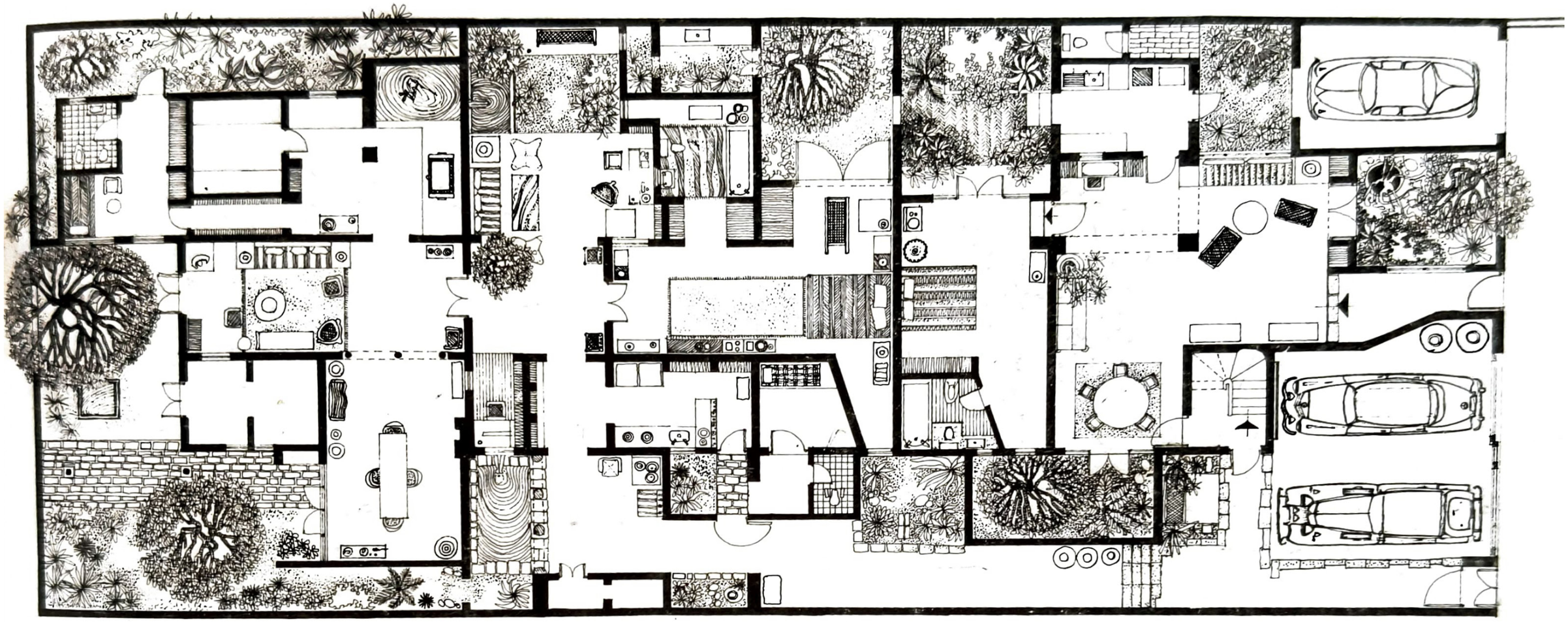






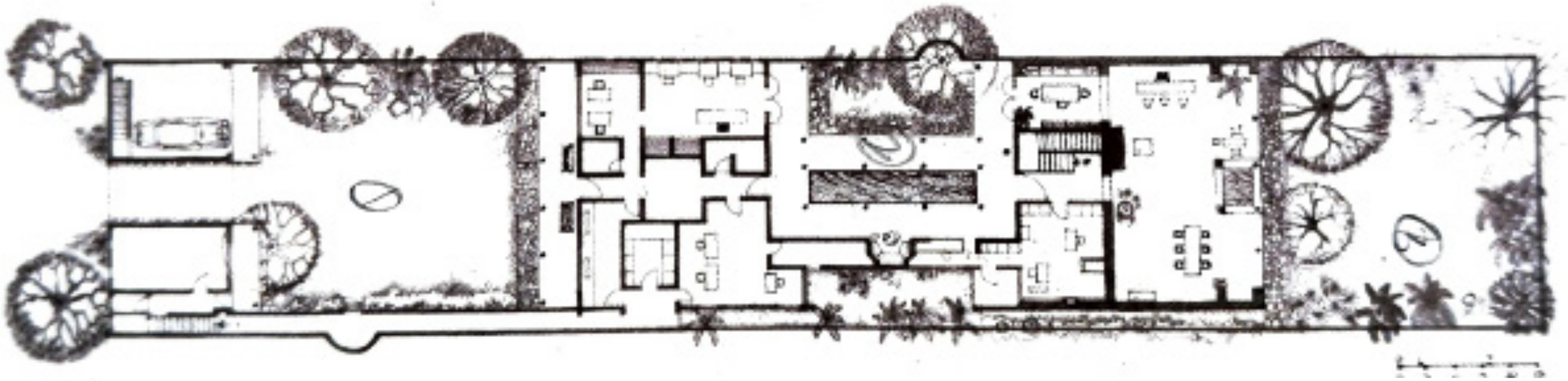
HOUSE NO. 11

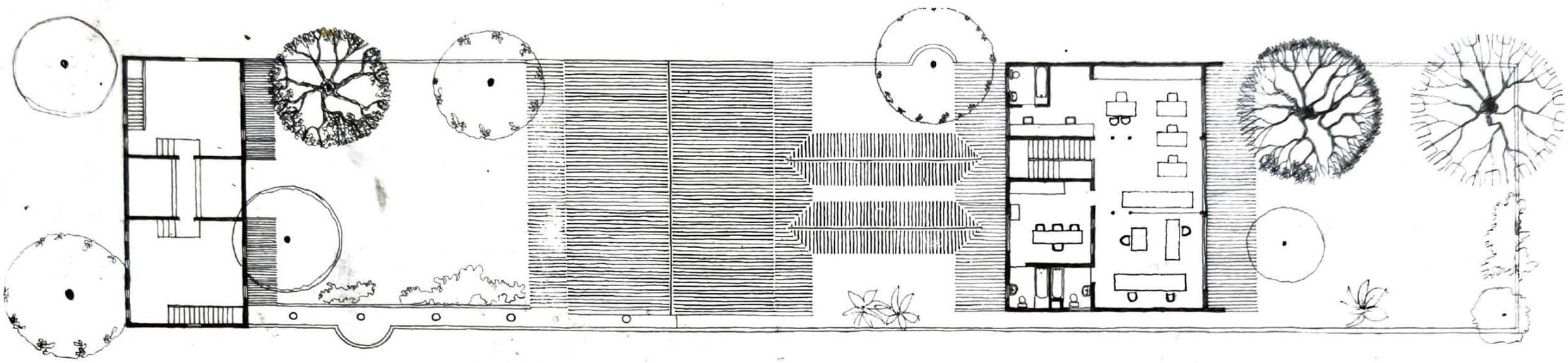
The Colombo residence of the architect Geoffrey Bawa. Completed in the early 70s, the house is emblematic of Sri Lanka's distinctive architectural style, showcasing the architect's prowess with the interplay of light and shadows, drawing together the interior and exterior, in this case through light-wells, and a bespoke collection of furniture. The house is a great introduction to the tropical modernist style and Geoffrey Bawa's aesthetic philosophy.



THE GALLERY CAFE

(We will stop here for a coffee or a meal) The iconic Gallery café showcases the other important elements of Bawa's style, the incorporation of eco-friendly local materials and design elements, using greenery and verandah style spaces that blur the boundaries between inside and outside, staying true to his modernist roots with open, free-flowing plan and art installations, the Gallery café frequently hosts art exhibitions and cultural events, and has become an integral part of Colombo's urban fabric.





SEEMA MALAKA TEMPLE

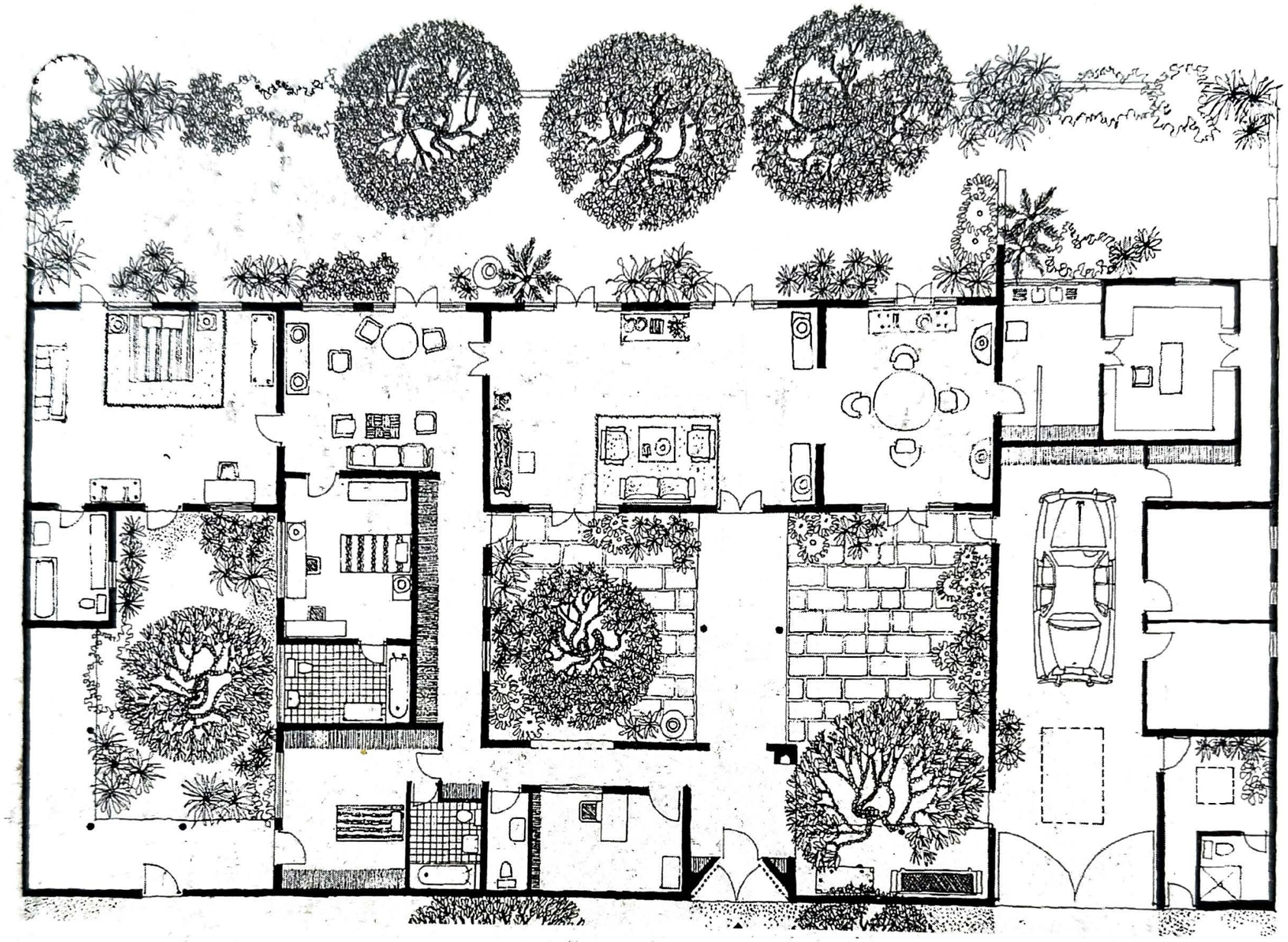
The Seema Malaka temple is part of the Gangaramaya temple complex, situated on Beira Lake. Constructed in the 19th century, the original temple structure had slowly sunk into the lake, and Geoffrey Bawa was brought in to redesign the structure in the 70s. Inspired by Buddhist monastic buildings of Anuradhapura, it is now largely used for rest and meditation.

GANGARAMYA TEMPLE

One of the most important Buddhist temples in Colombo, constructed in the 19th Century, it blends together Sri Lankan, Indian, Thai and Chinese influences to create a rich and eclectic architectural experience, and is an epitome of pre-modern Buddhist religious architecture.

DE SARAM HOUSE

Another iconic Bawa project, constructed in the late 80s for the acclaimed Sri Lankan pianist Druvi de Saram and his wife Sharmini, the house has been designed with the music room as its focal point. The house also boasts all the usual markers of Bawa's style, with a masterful use of interior courtyards and verandahs, local materials and the iconic frangipani trees - the house was restored in 2019 and currently only the gardens and lower levels are accessible to visitors.



DUNES HOTEL, UNAWATUNA

The Dunes Hotel in Unawatuna, designed by Vijitha Basnayaka, is defined by a simple plan that responds directly to its coastal environment. Minimal built elements are arranged to work with the natural contours, vegetation, and sea breeze, reducing the need for complex construction. Open circulation, lightweight structures, and clear spatial organization allow the landscape to remain dominant. The plan prioritizes ease, airflow, and views, demonstrating a resourceful approach where building less enhances experience. The Dunes exemplifies a quiet, environmentally attuned expression of contemporary tropical architecture rooted in simplicity and restraint.

SIGIRIYA

Located close to Dambulla in the Central Province, Sigirya, also known as 'Lion's Rock', is an ancient citadel built atop a 180m-tall granite peak that overlooks the surrounding landscape. Built by King Kassapa I in the 5th Century CE, the structure is a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the best examples of Sri Lanka's ancient monumental architecture and urban planning.

DAMBULLA CAVE TEMPLES

Near Sigiriya is the town of Dambulla, which is famous for its Buddhist cave temples. The caves feature numerous Buddha figures and wall paintings depicting events from the Buddha's life, as well as idols of Hindu gods and goddesses. The complex consists of 5 main caves, each dating to a different period of Sri Lanka's history,

ANURADHAPURA

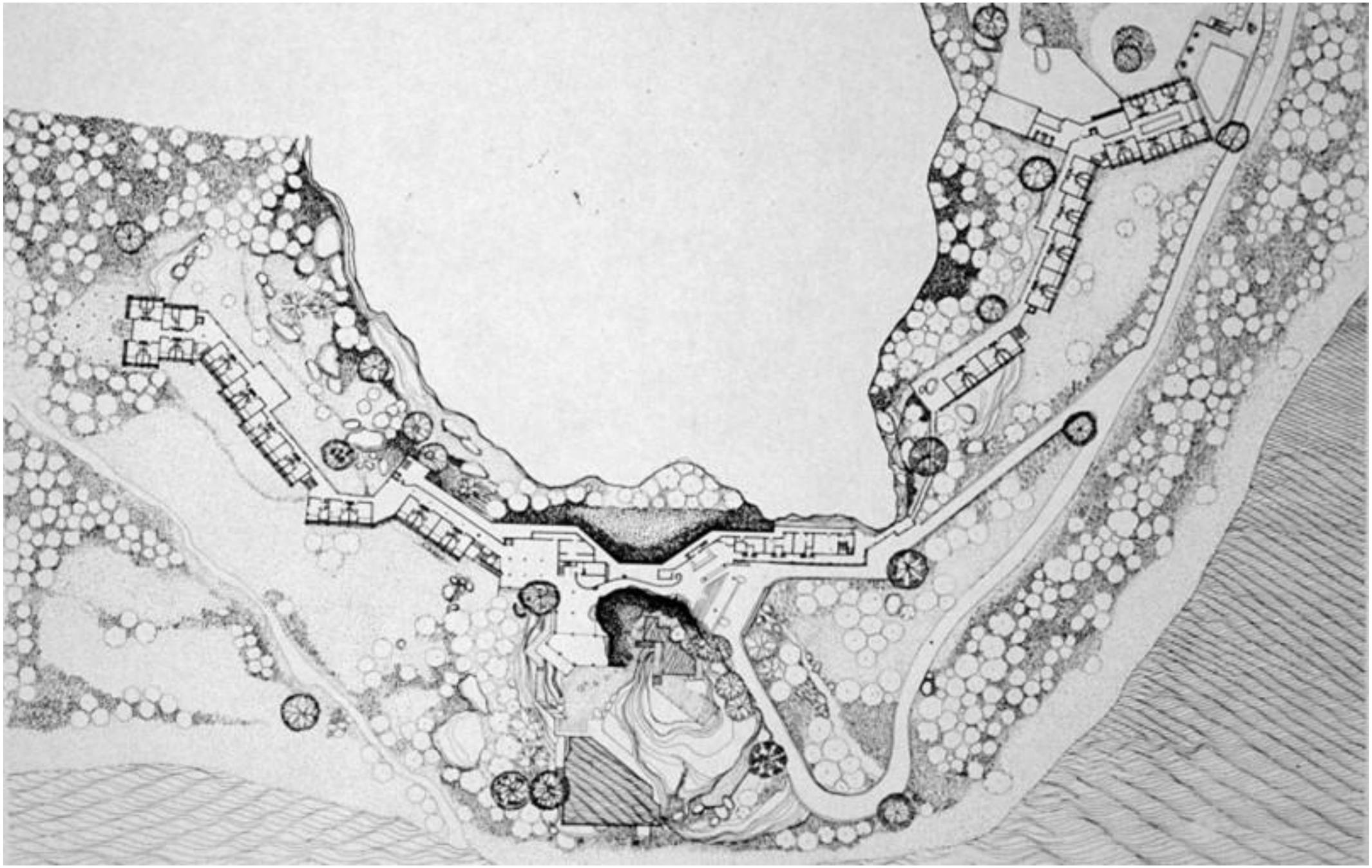
The original capital of the ancient Sinhalese Kingdom, located in the North-Central plains of the country. It was founded by King Pandukabhaya in the 5th Century BCE, making it one of the oldest inhabited sites in Asia. It remained the capital for over 1300 years, until its abandonment in the 10th Century CE. Known for its numerous stupas, religious and administrative architecture, as well as advanced water supply systems and reservoirs, Anuradhapura is a UNESCO world heritage site.

POLLONARUWA

Following the destruction of Anuradhapura in 993 CE, Pollonaruwa became the second capital of the Sinhalese Kingdom. Designed as a lush garden city by King Parakramabahu I, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to numerous palaces, stupas, shrines and landscaped gardens, as well as a Chola-era temple. Other notable features are the advanced irrigation system and the Parakrama Samudra, a large man-made reservoir dating back to the 4th Century CE.

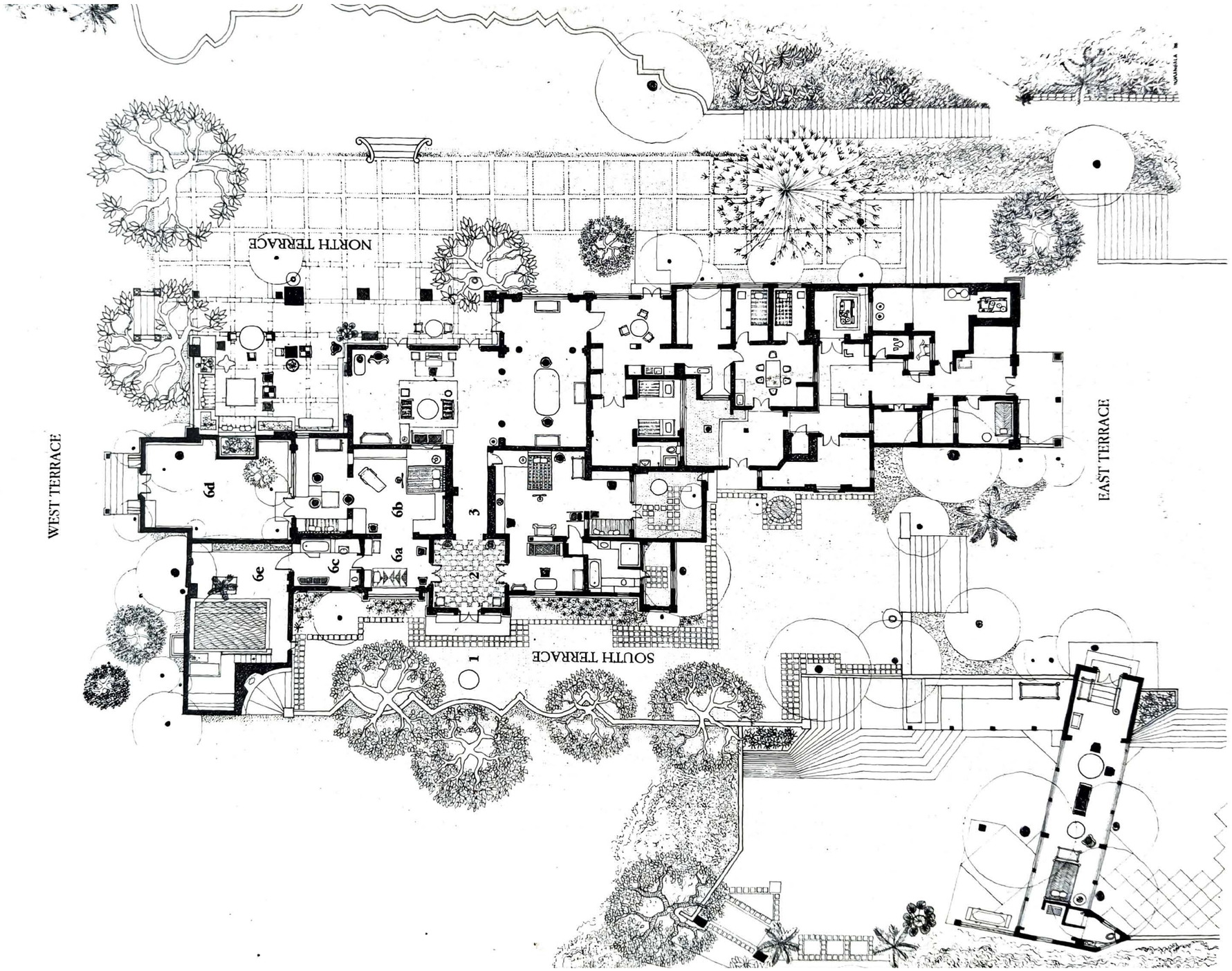
HERITANCE KANDALAMA

A luxury hotel tucked into the lush Sri Lankan landscape beside a large lake, the Kandalama Hotel is one of Geoffrey Bawa's most celebrated projects. The design demonstrates a masterful response to the landscape, framing the Sigiriya rock in the distance and merging into the dense vegetation, and an elegant modernist aesthetic distinct from other Bawa projects.



LUNUGANGA

A 25-acre estate property owned by Geoffrey Bawa, containing his country home and extensive landscaped gardens, Lunuganga can be considered Bawa's most personal project, which he worked on for over 40 years until his death in 2003. Nature and built form come together in harmonious ways to create unique visual compositions of light and texture.



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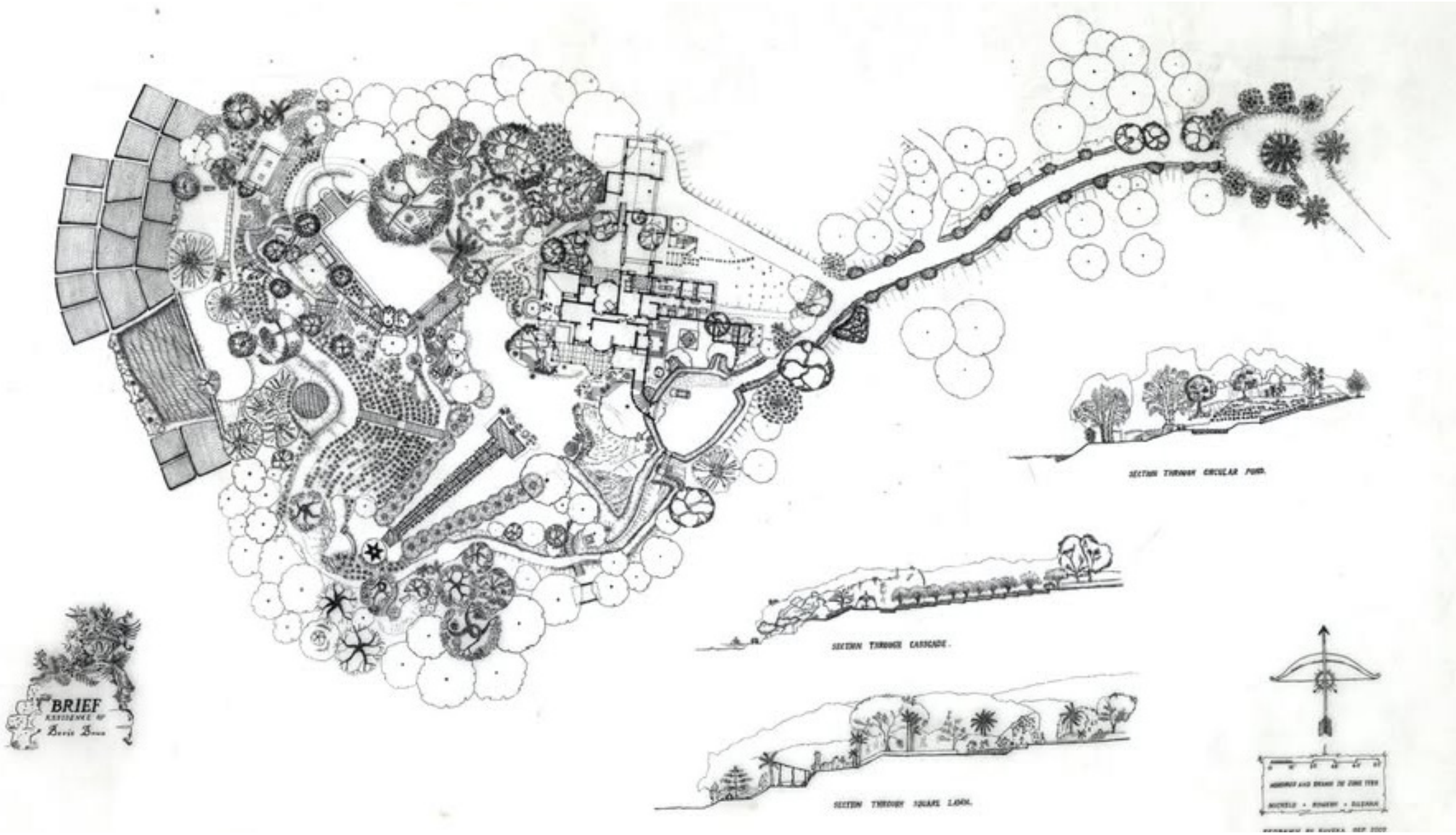
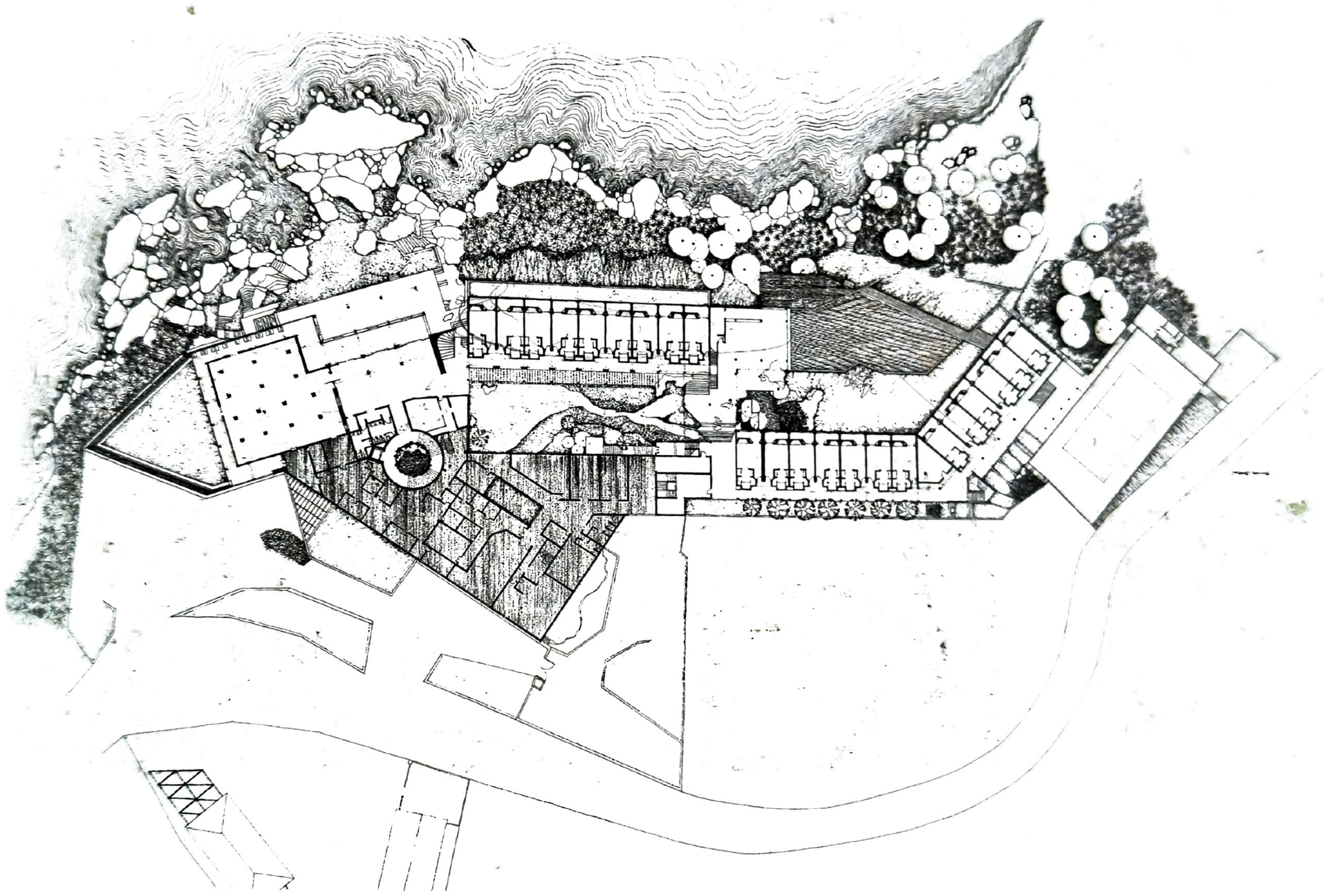
BEVIS BAWA'S BRIEF GARDENS

A landscaped garden designed by Geoffrey's brother, the landscape architect Bevis Bawa. Bevis Bawa converted the family plantation into a series of tropical vistas, utilising a number of exotic plant species, punctuated by carefully choreographed architectural elements, sculptures and a water terrace.



JETWING LIGHTHOUSE

One of Bawa's most famous commercial projects, Jetwing Lighthouse is a 5-star hotel property located along Sri Lanka's southern coast close to Galle. With features like courtyards, pools and gardens that seem to emerge from the surrounding landscape overlooking the Indian Ocean, the building expertly combines modern design with tropical aesthetics and detailing. It houses many important artworks, including a sculpture by Laki Senanayake, and paintings by Barbara Sansoni and Ena da Silva.



GALLE FORT

Surrounded by fortifications and water on three sides, Galle Fort houses the city's famed old quarter. First founded by Portuguese traders, the town was expanded and extensively fortified by the Dutch in the 17th Century. Today it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, its colonial architecture reflects the synthesis of European and local building styles, a prime example of the hybrid influences characteristic of South and Southeast Asian colonial architecture.

01

LIVING ARCHIVES:

The Layered Narrative

Group 01

Daksha Singh, Harini Ganesh, Minisha Bothra, Tanvi Lad

In Sri Lanka, architecture has never arrived fully formed, it has slowly learned how to live. It learned from monsoon rains, from heat and shade, from water that sustains and erodes, and from hands that built patiently over time. In ancient places like Anuradhapura, Dambulla and Sigiriya, buildings were **not objects but environments.**

The courtyards held social life, thresholds choreographed ritual, and reservoirs anchored power and survival. As society changed, these spaces shifted too. The **narratives of the courtyard and the transitional spaces** captures this transformation most poignantly. What was once a sacred anchor for collective ritual has evolved into experiential and climatic devices, while transitional spaces moved from expressions of power and ritual to sensory mediators of movement and privacy.

This story is bound together by **water, the island's most restless narrator.** It flows from ceremonial ponds that once mirrored royal power to the atmospheric pools of contemporary design that mirror the sky. Geoffrey Bawa's work sits within this continuum, reinterpreting tradition rather than replicating it, revealing Sri Lankan architecture as an ongoing negotiation between nature and culture, memory and change. Rather **than a linear history, we find a series of layers,** where each generation reinterprets the lessons of the past to create a space that remains, above all, deeply human.

Influence of Craft in Bawa's Work

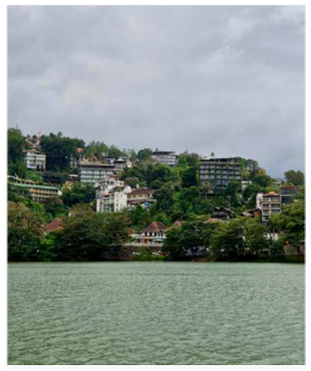
Tanvi Lad | PAT24417

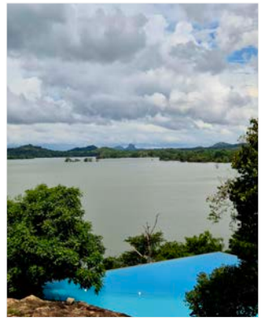
Sri Lanka's architecture grows from its environment—monsoon, heat, vegetation, ritual. Before technology, builders relied on material wisdom, passive cooling, and craft. By the 3rd century BCE, farming, trade, and Buddhism shaped Anuradhapura's irrigation civilization, where stupas and reservoirs joined faith and water. Power moved to Polonnaruwa, refinement giving way to fragmentation, while the Kandyan highlands preserved tradition amid colonial change and the hope of independence. As modern materials and methods reshape the island, ***does contemporary craft still speak with nature and ritual — or is it drifting from those roots?***

01a

Geoffery Bawa's architectural evolution in Sri Lanka moves from experimentation towards a mature language now known as tropical modernism. His early work explored how modern architecture could exist in a monsoon climate without losing connection to history and landscape. Rather than importing western forms, he gradually shifted toward design rooted in site, climate and cultural memory.

Across his career, Bawa moved from objects to experiences: from designing buildings to designing journeys through light, shade wind and landscape. His works over the time evolved to represent a synthesis of Sri Lankan craft traditions, Buddhist spatial sensibility, colonial hybridity and modernist restraint – an architecture that feels both contemporary and deeply of its place.

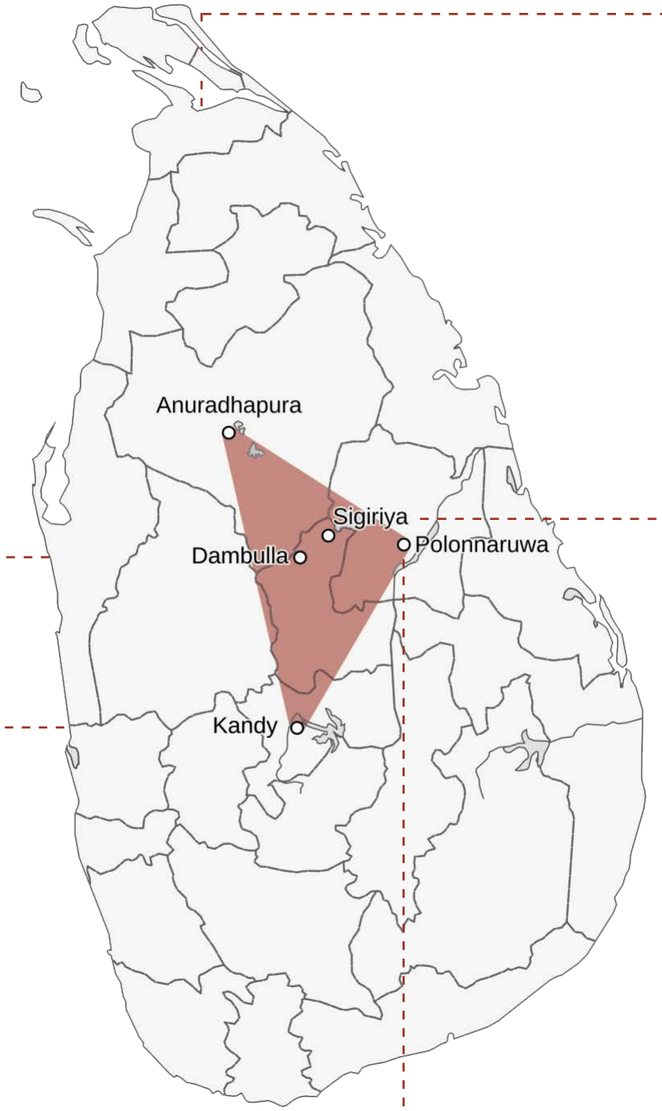


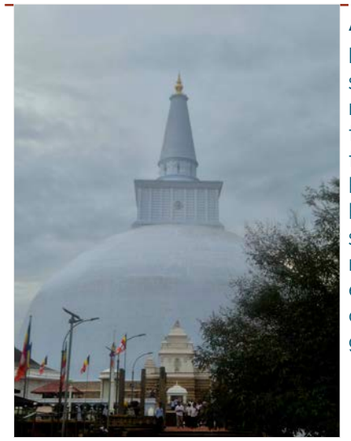


The architectural lineage emerges from a deep philosophical relationship with landscape, climate, and ritual life. Rather than imposing form on nature, earlier builders learned to work with the terrain: carving, shaping, and assembling spaces that remain inseparable from the environments that hold them. Rock was craved to hold meditation, timber columns were joint to flex with humidity, roofs were pitched to welcome monsoon rain and walls were painted to narrate myth and history. Architecture and craft were therefore inseparable – each gesture carried cultural symbolism and environmental intelligence.

Cultural Triangle

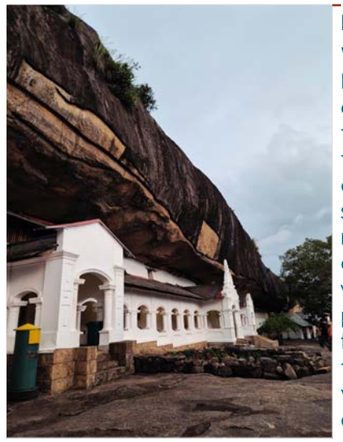
Located in the dry zone of Sri Lanka, the Cultural Triangle links the three historic centers of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Kandy, forming a heartland that reveals how architecture evolved over time. Here, landscapes once shaped into monumental sacred realms gradually transformed into refined civic forms and, later, into more intimate, craft-driven spaces — all grounded in a continuous dialogue between Buddhism, environment, and culture. Together, these three cities trace nearly two thousand years of Buddhist civilization, political shifts, and architectural experimentation.





Anuradhapura

It laid the foundations of spirituality, constructing monumental irrigation tanks that worked in harmony with temples. Architecture here was both spiritual and ecological, buildings grew around water systems, ritual pathways, and natural terrain. The built forms emphasized calm, symmetry, and circular movement that guided devotion.

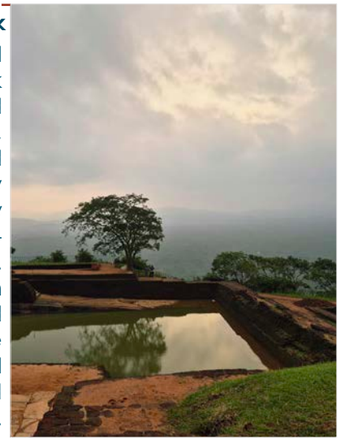


Dambulla Cave Temple

Within this landscape, the Dambulla Cave Temples stand as the spiritual counterpart to royal capitals — a place that embodies continuity, devotion, and the evolving story of Buddhism. This living monastic complex, carved directly into rock and layered with paintings and statues patronized by successive kings from Anuradhapura through the Kandyan era, turns the very landscape into sacred architecture.

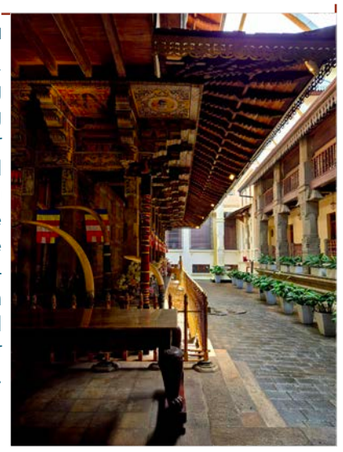
Sigiriya, Lion Rock

Built by King Kashyapa as a royal citadel, transforms a towering rock outcrop into a meticulously planned city with axial gardens, reservoirs, mirrored walls, and elevated palaces. It showcases extraordinary engineering and hydraulic mastery — water channels and pressure-fed fountains that still work today. Its frescoes and the dramatic Lion Gate reveal a court culture invested in spectacle and symbolism, while the site itself also reflects the political fragility of kingship that collapsed after Kashyapa's fall.



Sri Dalada Maligawa

Kandy, a mountain kingdom, focused on preserving sovereignty while adapting to changing times. Its timber pavilions, raised plinths, and intricate pekada (bracket) joinery show an architecture that became lighter, more craft-driven, climate-responsive, and centred on ritual choreography and everyday gatherings rather than monumental scale.



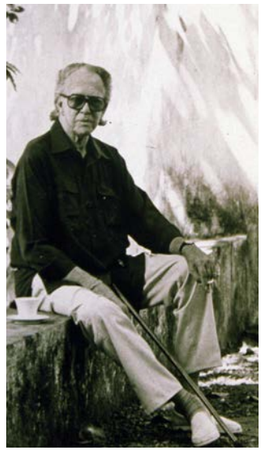
Polonnaruwa

It brought refinement, order, and monumental expression. Seeking stability, its rulers planned cities with carefully organized layouts, elegant image houses, and statues of the Buddha in seated and standing postures. Brick and stone construction matured, and subtle influences from South Indian architecture became visible in form and detail.

Together the cultural triangle becomes more than a collection of monuments like a living archive of Sri Lanka's past. Seen as one story, these places show how architecture here was never about building structures but about shaping ways of life – negotiating climate, ritual, politics and belief over centuries. And leaving behind a landscape where history can still be walked, climbed and experienced.

Context

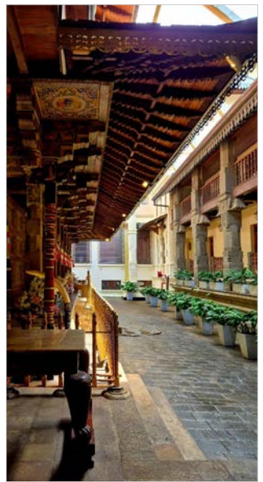
Timeline

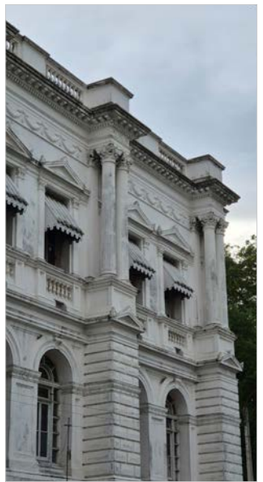


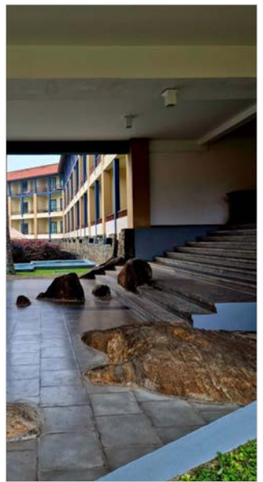
1919 - Geoffrey Bawa born in Colombo into a privileged family with complex, mixed race background that bridge Asian and European cultures. Over the time he had visited most of the archaeological sites and was well acquited with its ancient buildings and architectural traditions. Post independence architecture was largely uninspired.

Shift of career from lawyer to architect with more than 100 projects during his peak career. As his career developed, he continued to draw his knowledge of European architecture of which influences can be seen in Lunuganga, but he responded more to the context of Sri Lanka with regards to people, geography, history and traditions of Sri Lanka

	Early Buddhism Phase	Anuradhapura (Peak)	Influence of Pandyas, Pallavas, Cholas	Polonnaruwa	Kotte/ Gampola / Kandy	Arabs, Chinese, Portuguese	Dutch	British Colonial	Post Independence, Bawa' s view of history
	377 BCE – 101 BCE	101 BCE – 993 BCE	993 BCE – 1070 BCE	1070 BCE – 1215 BCE	1293 – 1505	1505 – 1658	1658 – 1796	1796 – 1948	1948 – 2003
Architecture Influence						European military	Dutuch tropical	Colonial tropical	Vernacular modernism, Kandyan influence, Anuradhapura lineage
Important Structures	Dambulla Cave	Jetavanaramaya Stupa	Royal Palace of King Parakramabahu	Vatadage Polonnaruwa	Sri Dalada Maligawa	Coastal forts	Dutch canal houses	Railways, bungalows	Bentota Beach, **Seema Malaka, Kandalama Hotel,** Jetwing Lighthouse



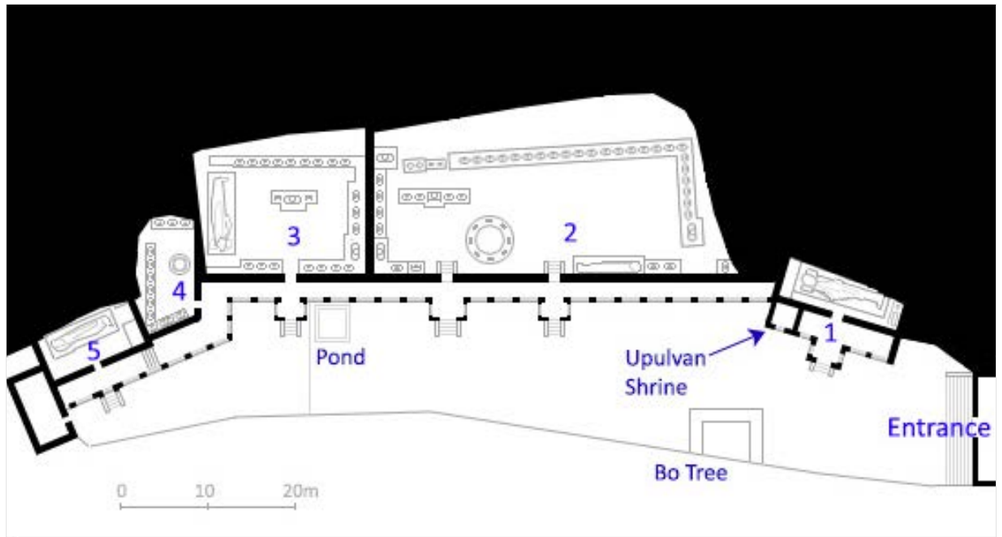




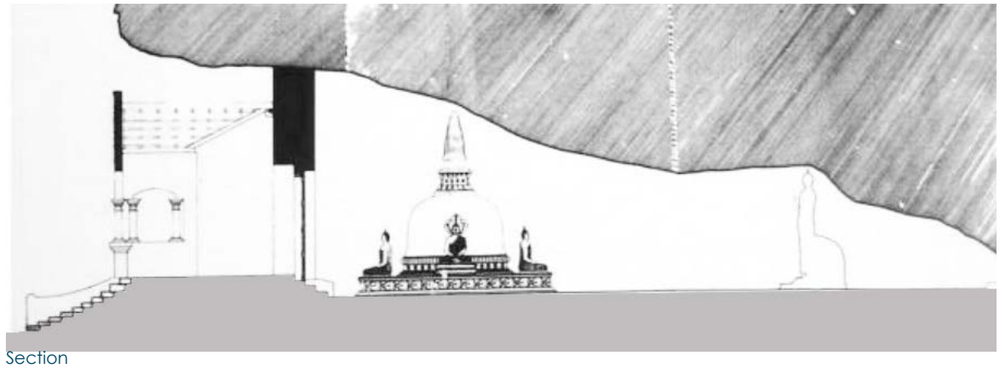
Dambulla

Dambulla Cave Temple

The Dambulla Cave Temple (Golden Temple of Dambulla) is Sri Lanka's largest cave-temple complex. It sits on a huge rock outcrop overlooking the plains, and within the rock are five main caves that were gradually turned into richly decorated Buddhist shrines. Monks used natural caves for shelter, meditation, quiet monastic life. Simple features like drip ledges were cut into the rock to stop rainwater entering. Instead of carving new spaces into rock the craftsmen used existing natural caves and transformed them with walls and entrances, Buddha statues, painted ceilings and murals, small shrines and stupas, verandas and drip ledges outside to divert rain.



Plan



Section

The image above shows the layout of five caves and the section of how verandha has been incorporated.

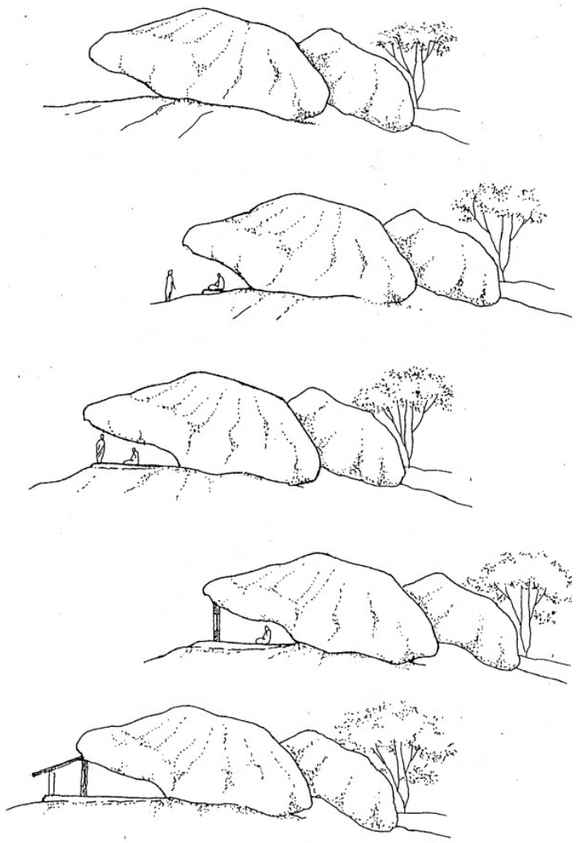
Ref:

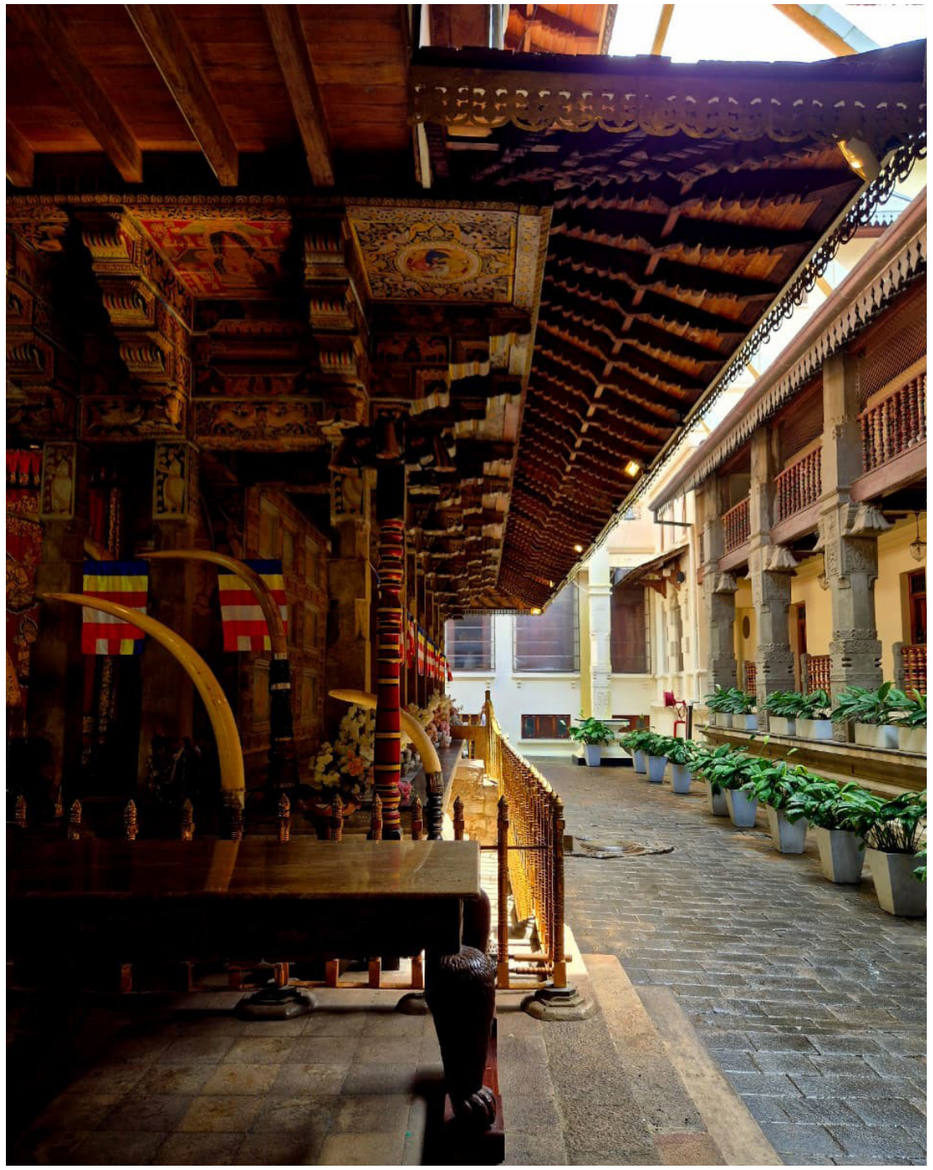
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280839845_Sri_Lankan_Cave_Architecture

https://www.asiaphotos.org/SRI%20LANKA/LIBRARY/7B%20-%20Sri%20Lanka%20-%20Dambulla%2020190131%20public.pdf

https://www.orientalarchitecture.com/sid/1954/sri-lanka/matale-district/maharaja-vihara-dambulla-cave-no-2

Unlike natural caves that were first used as shelter or habitation in prehistoric times, the Dambulla cave complex was intentionally developed as a Buddhist religious site. Natural rock shelters were adapted by early Buddhist communities for spiritual purposes, with minimal alteration to the rock except additions like plastered walls, painted surfaces, and sculptural elements to make the spaces suitable for worship and monastic use. The primary intention behind the cave complex was religious and monastic

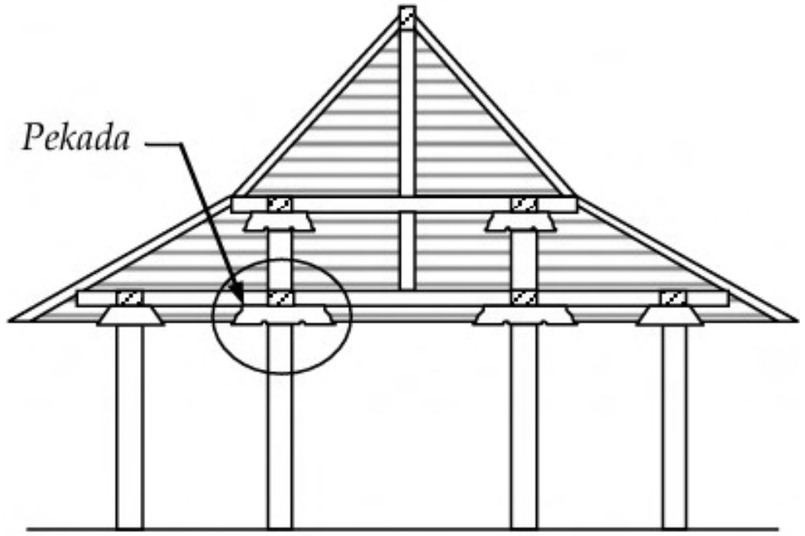




Kandy

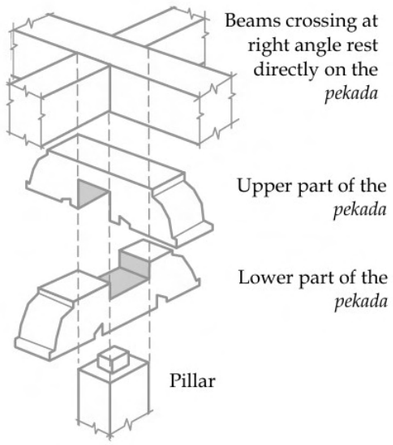
Sri Dalada Maligawa - Kandy

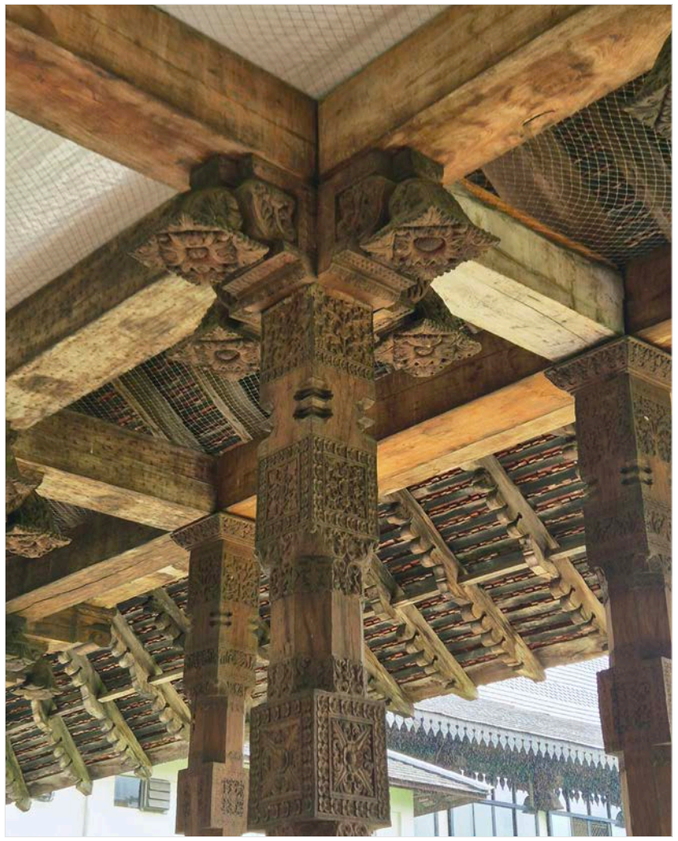
It is the most sacred Buddhist temple in the country because it houses the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha. The relic arrived in Sri Lanka in the 4th century CE and has long been associated with royal power and religious authority — historically, the ruler who safeguarded the relic was seen as the rightful king. The present temple forms part of the former Royal Palace complex and reflects Kandyan architecture with timber columns, carved brackets, layered courtyards, and richly decorated interiors. The relic itself is never displayed; it is protected inside a series of nested golden caskets within the Inner Shrine. Daily rituals (pūjā) take place three times a day, and the temple is the focal point of the annual Esala Perahera procession, one of Sri Lanka's grandest cultural festivals.



Ref:

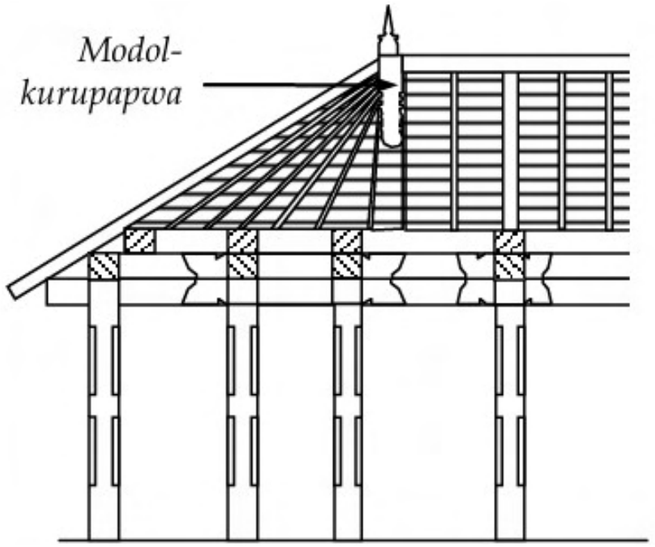
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/376616426_Historical_Timber_Structures_in_Sri_Lanka_A_Review_on_Pekada_Kanimandala_and_Madol-kurupawa

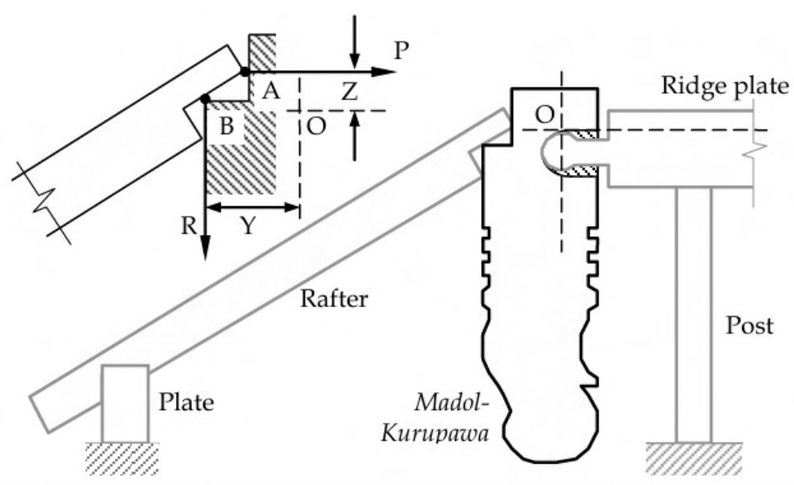


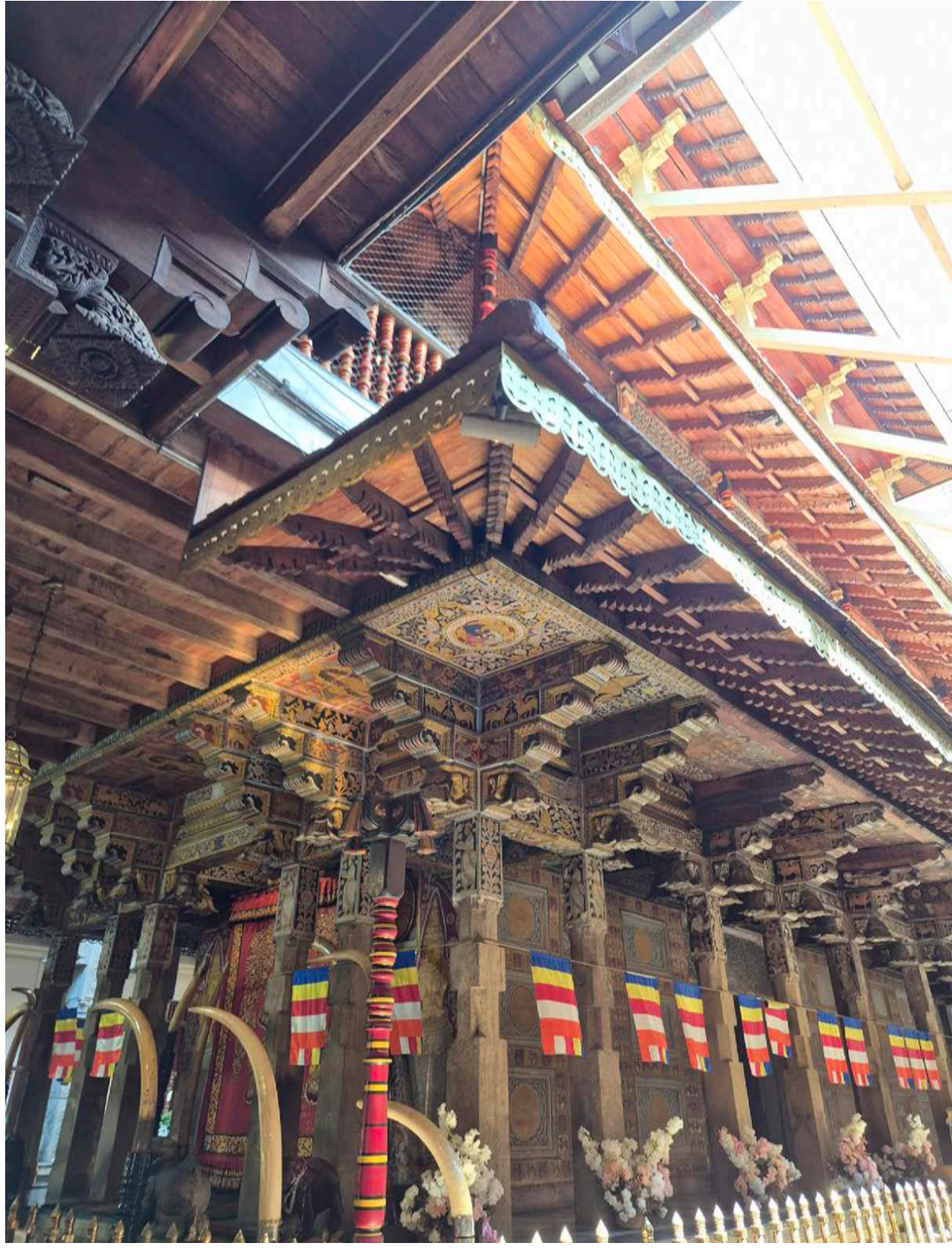


Column - Beam Craftmenship

In Sri Dalada Maligawa, the column–beam joints rely on the traditional *pekada* a carved timber bracket placed between the vertical column and the horizontal beam. Instead of metal fasteners, builders used mortise-and-tenon joints and wooden pegs, allowing the structure to expand and contract with humidity. The pekada spreads the roof load gently into the column, provides flexibility during movement, and becomes a crafted ornament that expresses hierarchy and symbolism. Structurally efficient yet highly decorative, these joints reveal how Kandyan builders turned engineering knowledge into refined craftsmanship.







Roof Joints Craftmenship

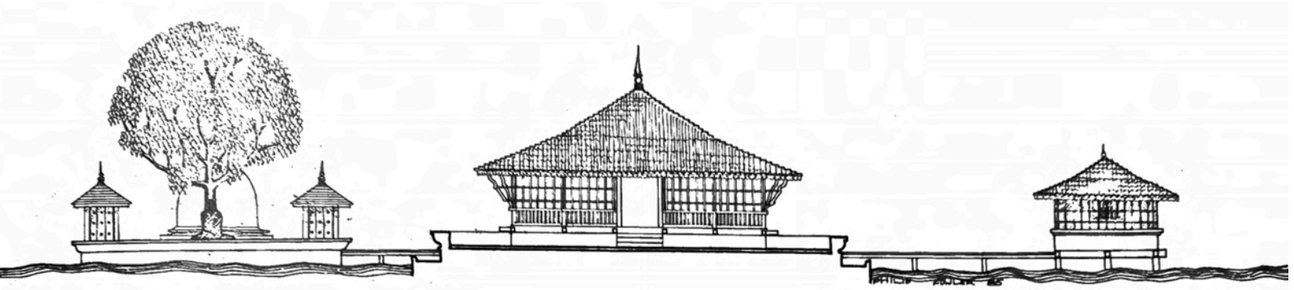
The roof system is intentionally light and layered, designed for heavy monsoon rains. Interlocking rafters, purlins, and ridge members are connected using notched, pegged, and scarfed joints, again avoiding metal to prevent corrosion. These joints let the roof "breathe," reducing stress while improving ventilation and drainage. Large overhangs protect walls and timber surfaces, while the joinery system keeps the structure repairable and adaptable. Altogether, the roof joints show how climate-responsive thinking and joinery tradition work together to create durability.

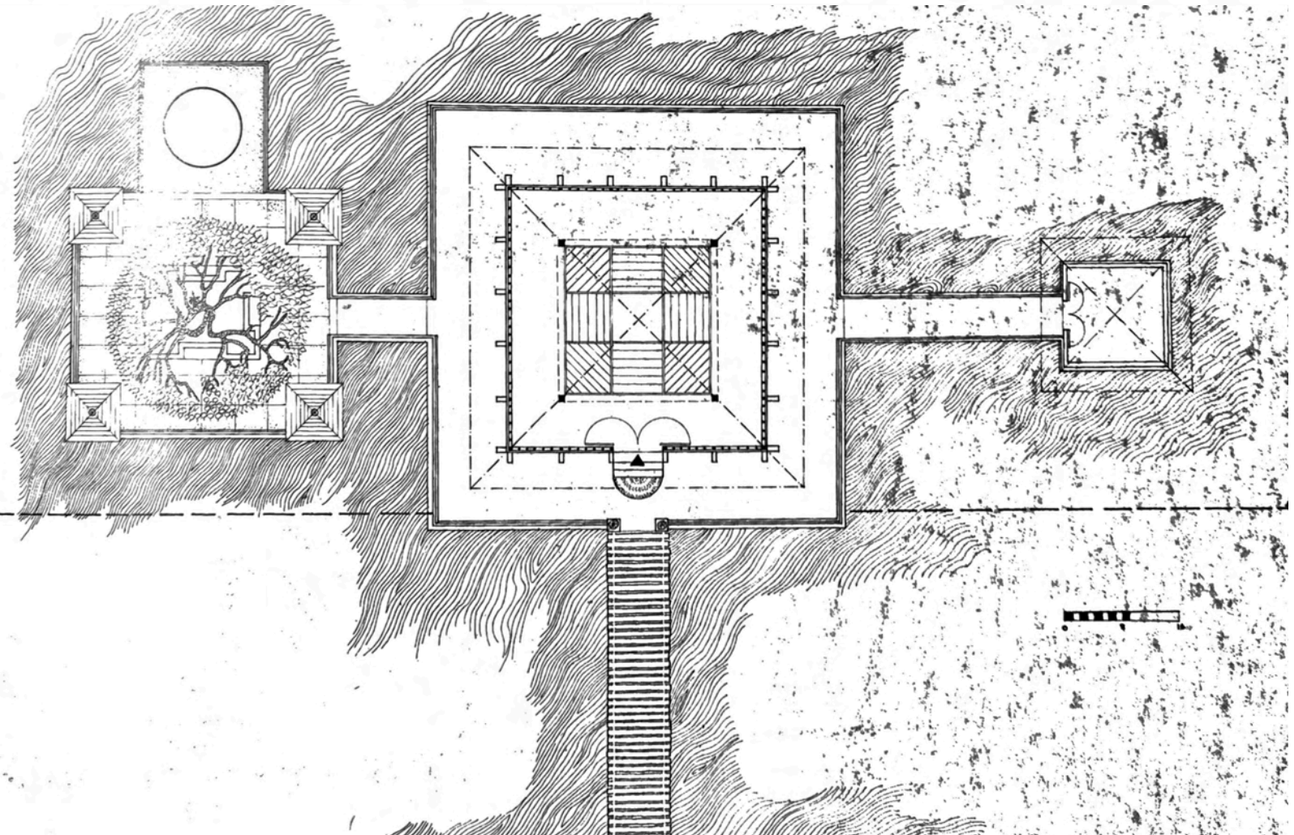
Seema Malaka

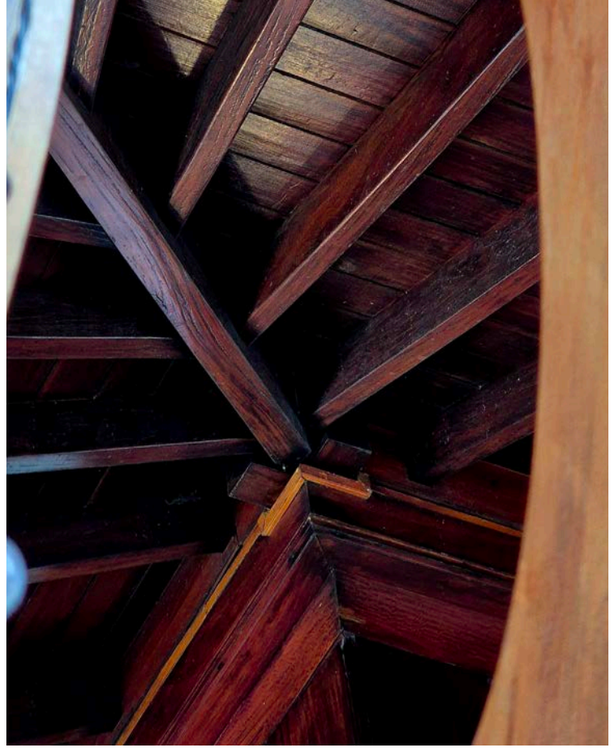
Seema Malaka

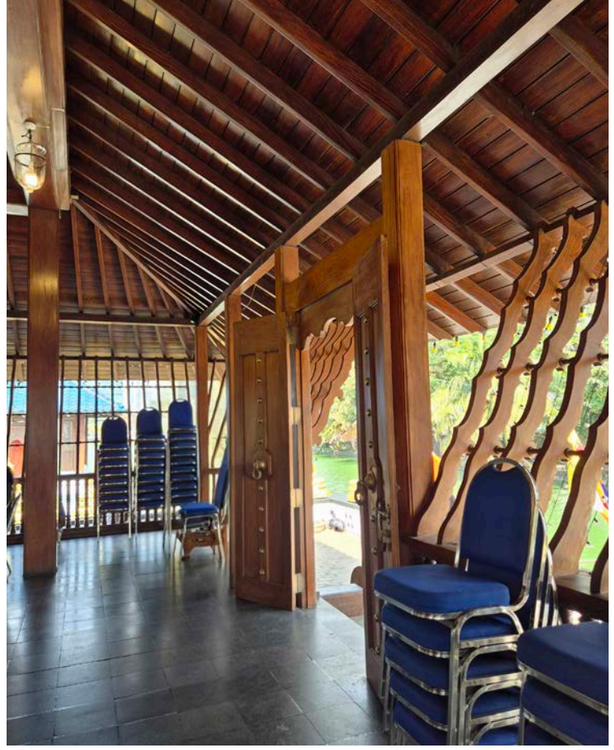
Seema Malaka, rebuilt by Geoffrey Bawa, shows a refined reinterpretation of Sri Lankan temple craftsmanship. Its timber pavilions use delicate columns, carved brackets, and traditional joinery that allow the building to age and be repaired, reflecting the quiet skill of local carpenters. Instead of copying history, Bawa drew inspiration from Kandyan architecture, especially its layered planning and processional movement.

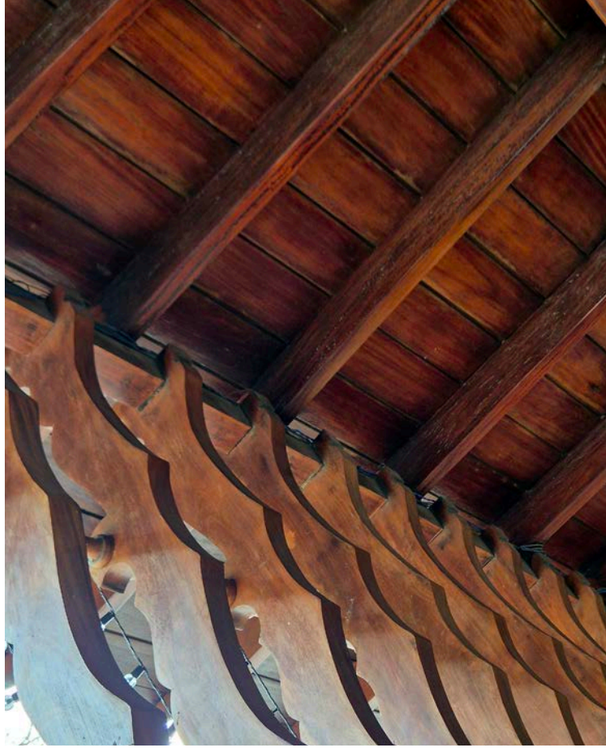
Like the temples of Kandy, sacred space is reached gradually through bridges and platforms, and the pavilions are arranged with hierarchy and symmetry. Here, however, water replaces the courtyard, creating a floating, meditative environment. Seema Malaka demonstrates how traditional craft and Kandyan planning principles can be transformed into a calm, contemporary sacred space.

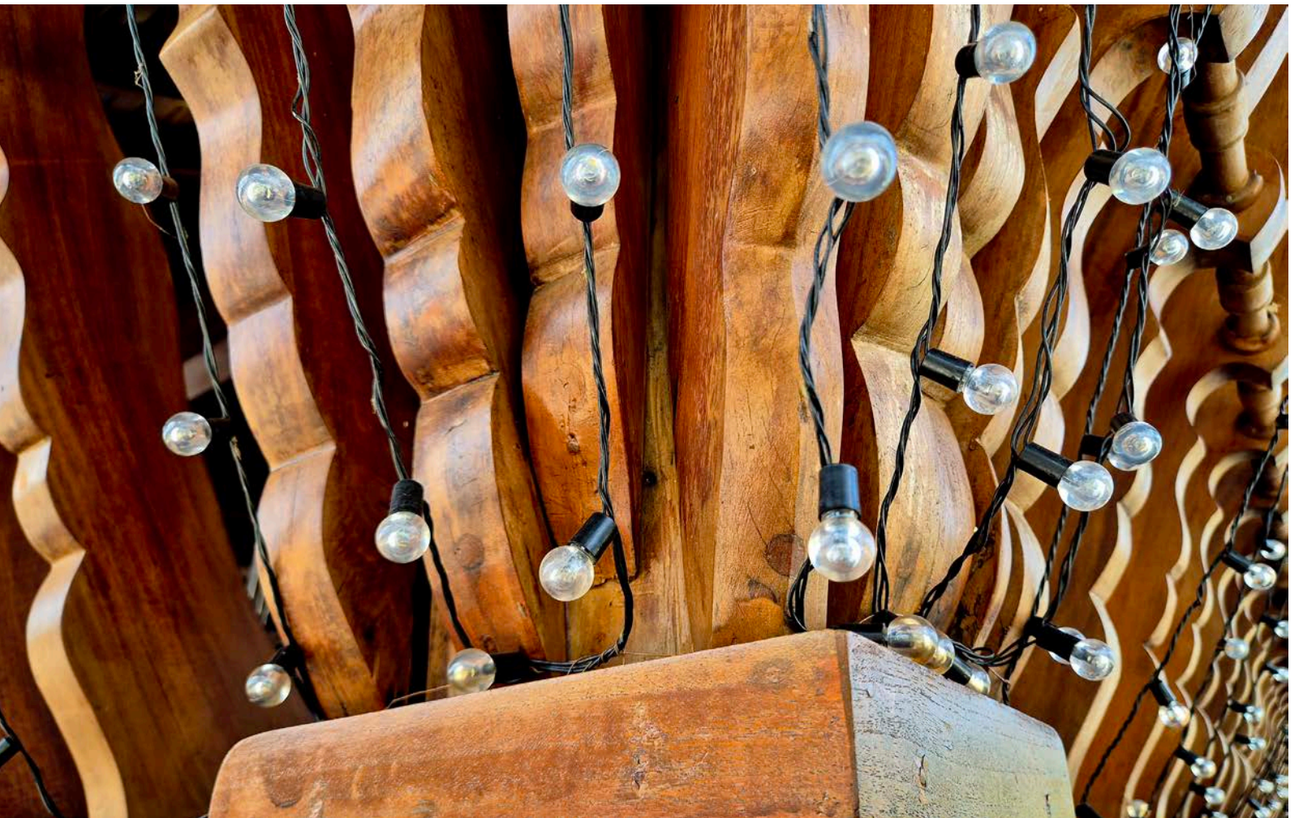




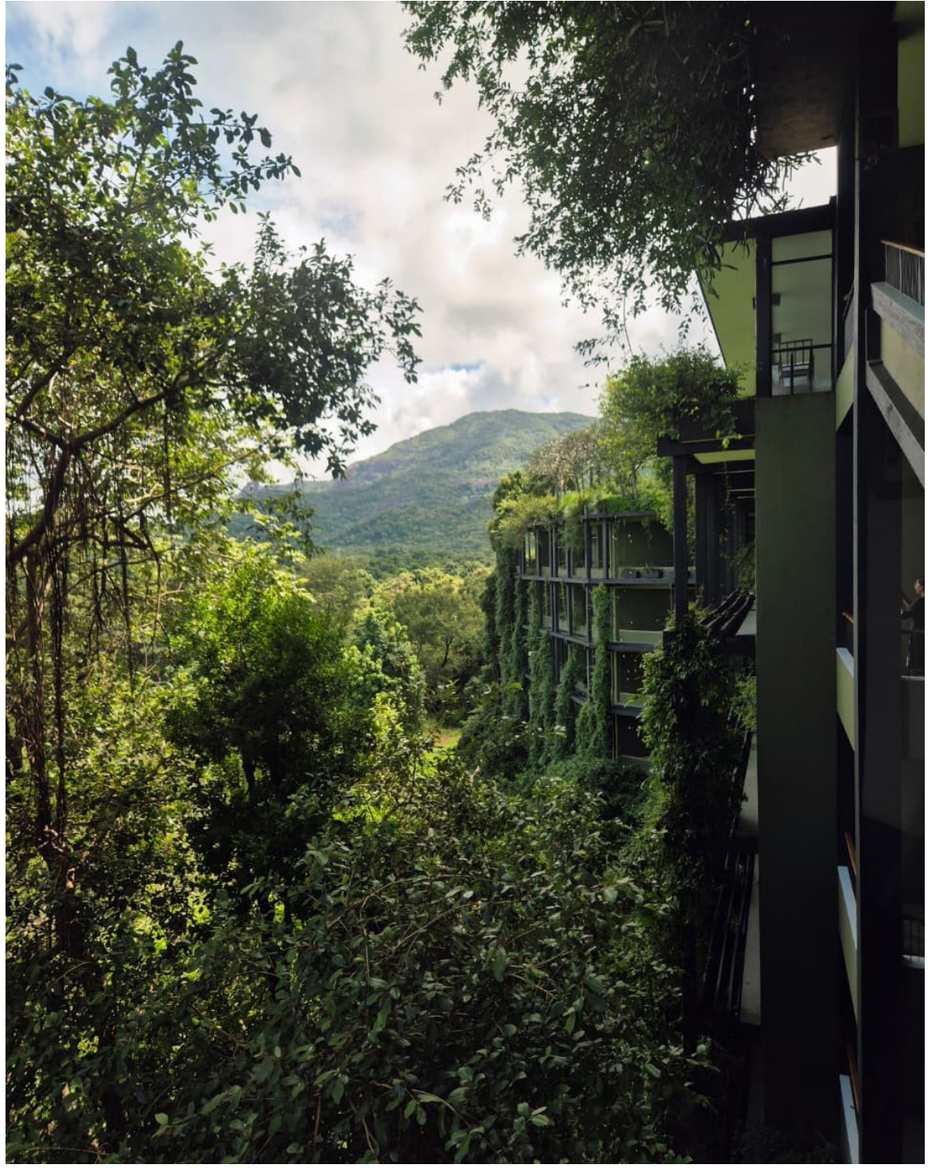








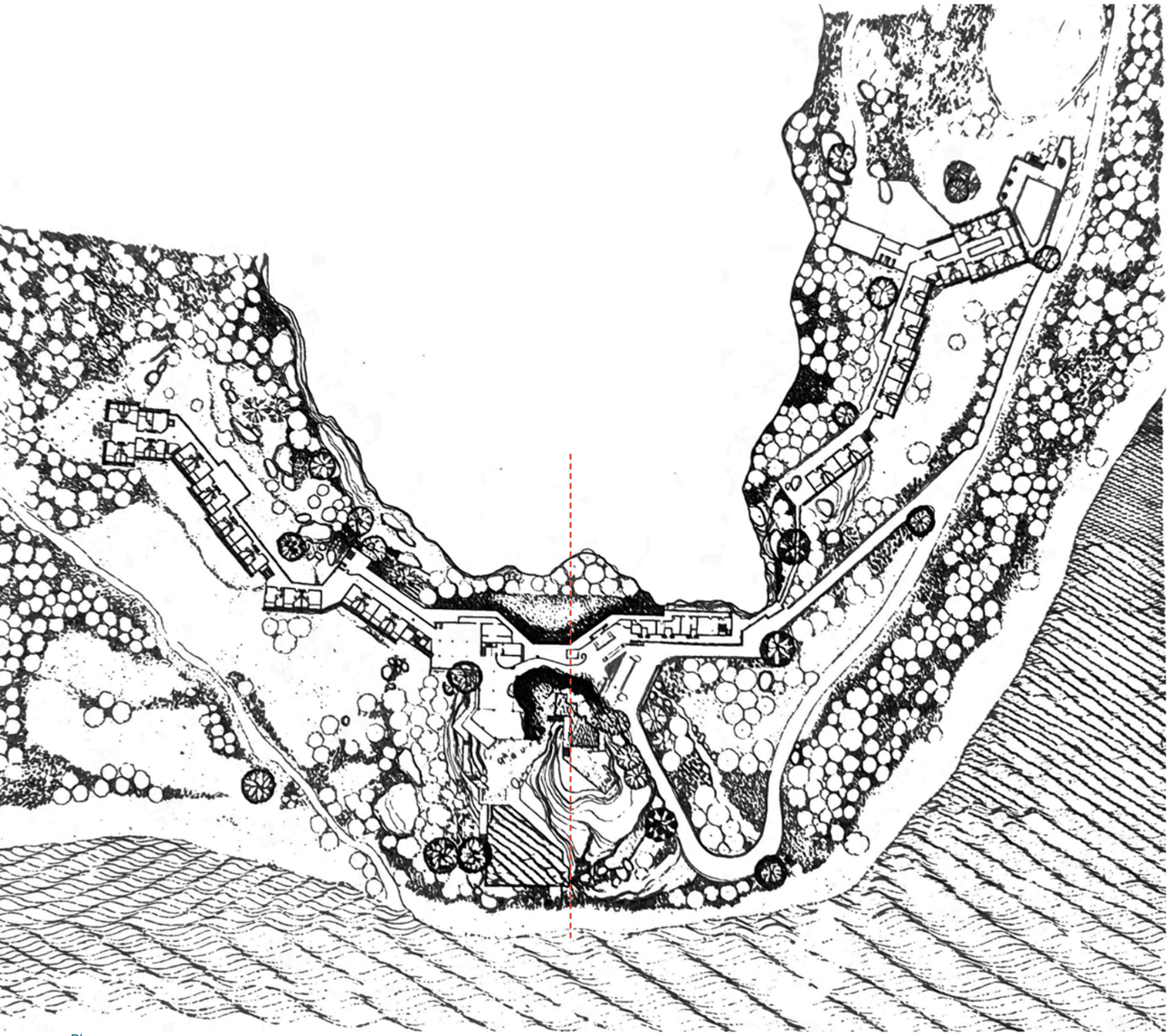
The craftsmanship of the structure is expressed as quiet, continuous timber. With the pavilions left open, the walls become mostly air. The long roof eaves , shaped with precise drip edges and overlapping joints manage tropical rain without the need for heavy gutters. Here, craft lies in the accuracy of lines and edges rather than in decoration. The joinery is designed as a modular system, where repeating column – beam units create a gentle, meditative rhythm, allowing craftsmanship to support spirituality. Each repeated joint invites the eye to pause, and every junction is resolved to balance climate, longevity, and elegance, proving that it is careful detailing and not ornament that gives the temple its calm, serene character.



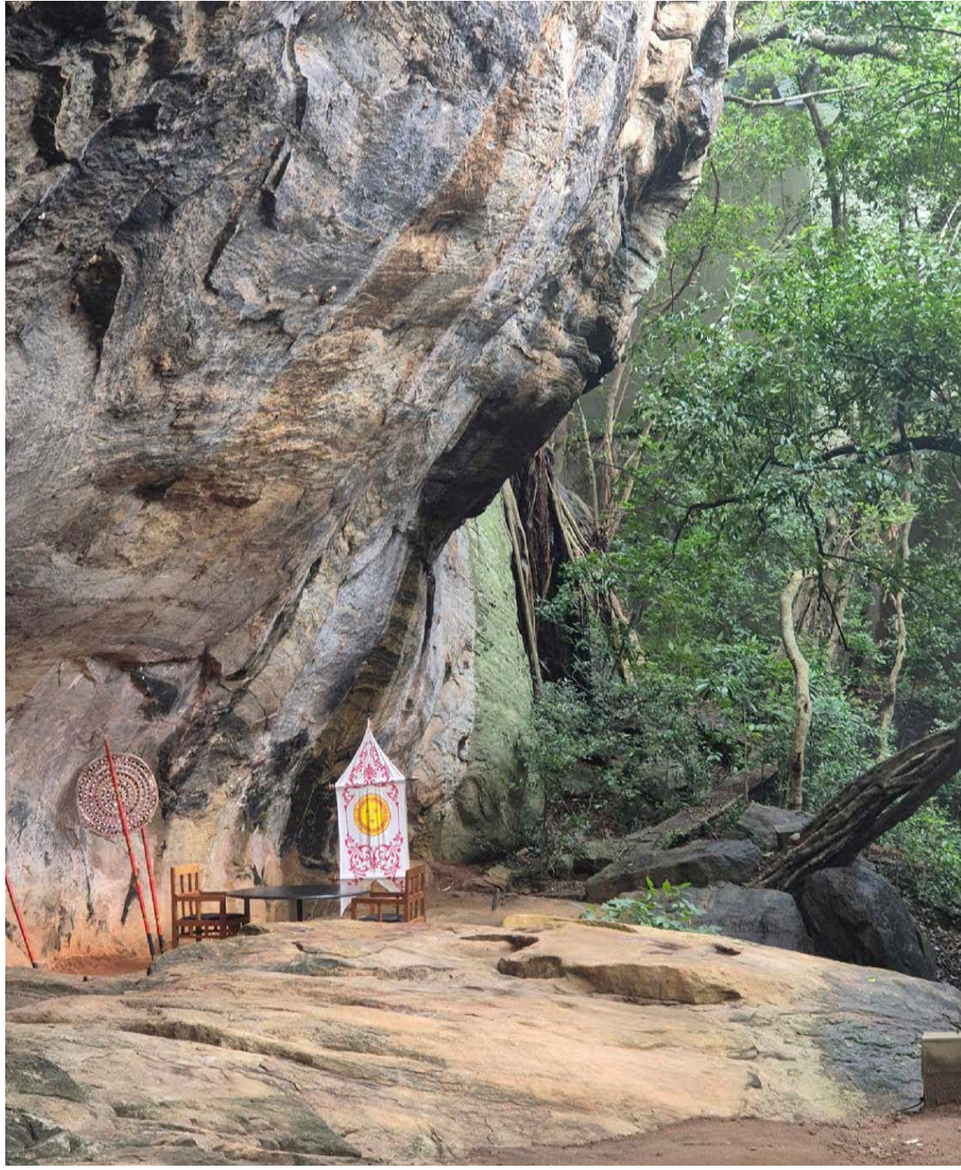
Kandalama

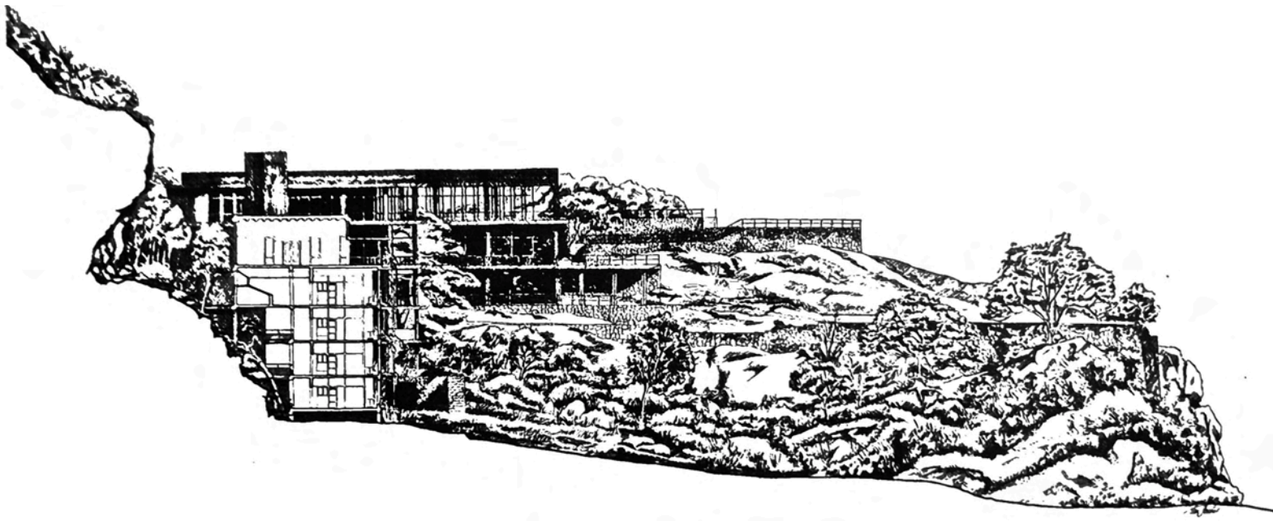
Heritance Kandalama

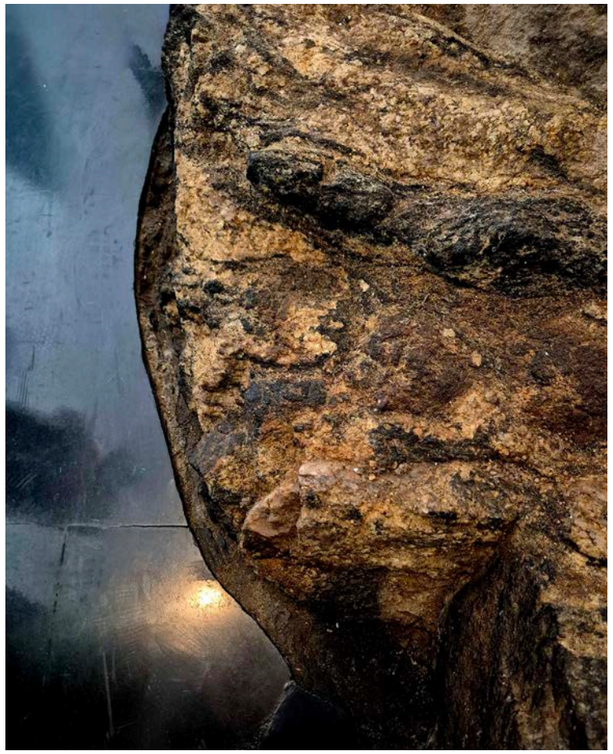
Heritance Kandalama, designed by Geoffrey Bawa, is crafted to blend seamlessly into its hillside rather than dominate it. The building uses rough concrete, local stone so that moss, vines, and weather naturally transform its surfaces over time. Careful detailing at edges — where walls meet rock, water, and vegetation — allows nature to enter without damaging the structure, while services and drainage are quietly hidden. Instead of decorative luxury, Kandalama relies on texture, proportion, and framed views. Its craftsmanship is subtle, ecological, and patient: the architecture is designed to age, adapt, and eventually feel as though it has always belonged to the landscape.

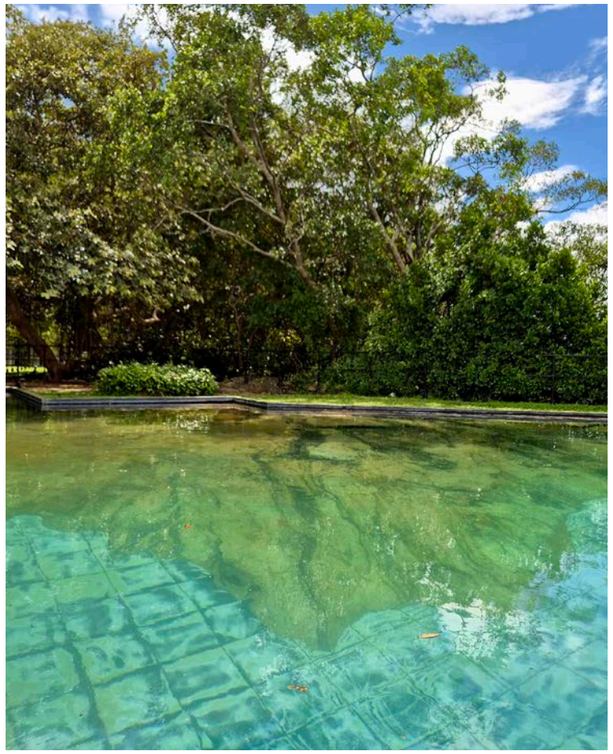


Plan





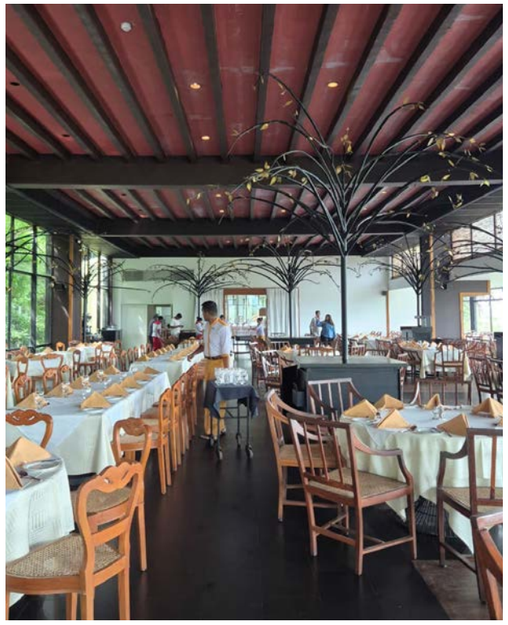


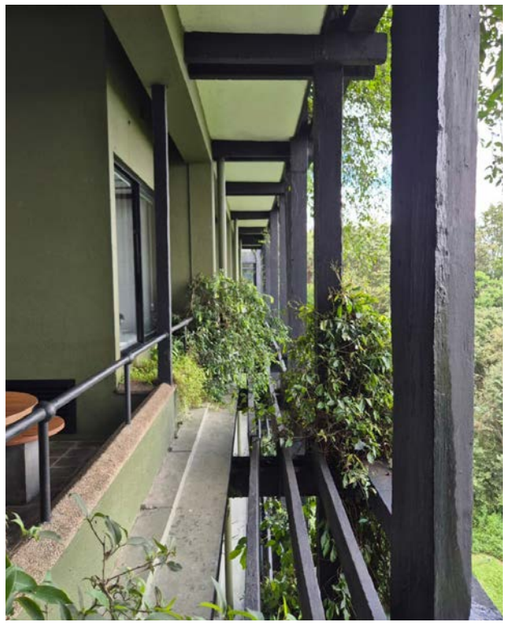


natural and man-made built form co-existance..

contemporary Sri Lankan architecture remains most authentic when craftsmanship continues the old dialogue between material, climate, and ritual. Where that conversation fades, buildings may stand but the deeper cultural craft that once shaped them quietly disappears.

Today the island stands in a phase of rebuilding - guided by memory, landscape, and resilience.





where the nature engulfs the built form...

01b

FROM SOCIAL CORE TO EXPERIENTIAL VOID: THE CHANGING SOCIAL INTENT OF COURTYARDS IN SRI LANKAN ARCHITECTURE

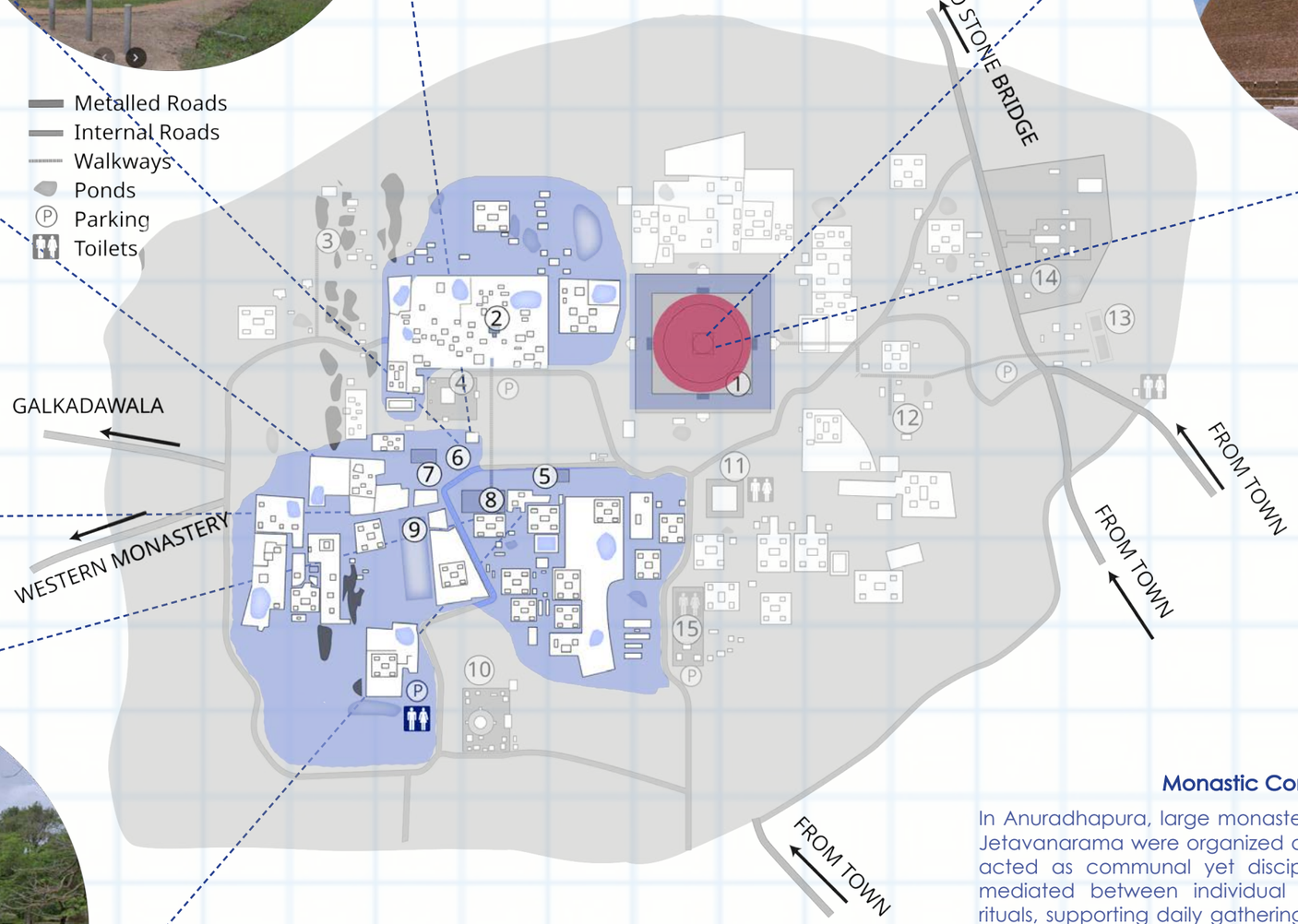
Daksha Singh | UAR23299

Courtyards occupy a quiet yet powerful position in Sri Lankan architecture, offering a lens through which changing relationships between space, society, and climate can be explored. From ancient royal precincts and monastic complexes to contemporary architectural works, the courtyard has continuously transformed—sometimes central and ceremonial, at other times fragmented and intimate. This exploration traces how courtyards shift in form and social intent, revealing how architecture responds to evolving cultural values, patterns of living, and perceptions of privacy, while still carrying forward deep-rooted climatic intelligence and a strong sense of place.

ANCIENT ERA

Burrows Pavillion

Bodhighara



Bodhighara

Monastic Complexes Of Anuradhapura

In Anuradhapura, large monasteries such as Abhayagiri and Jetavanarama were organized around open courtyards that acted as communal yet disciplined spaces. These courts mediated between individual monk cells and collective rituals, supporting daily gatherings, learning, movement, and meditation while maintaining inward-focused seclusion.

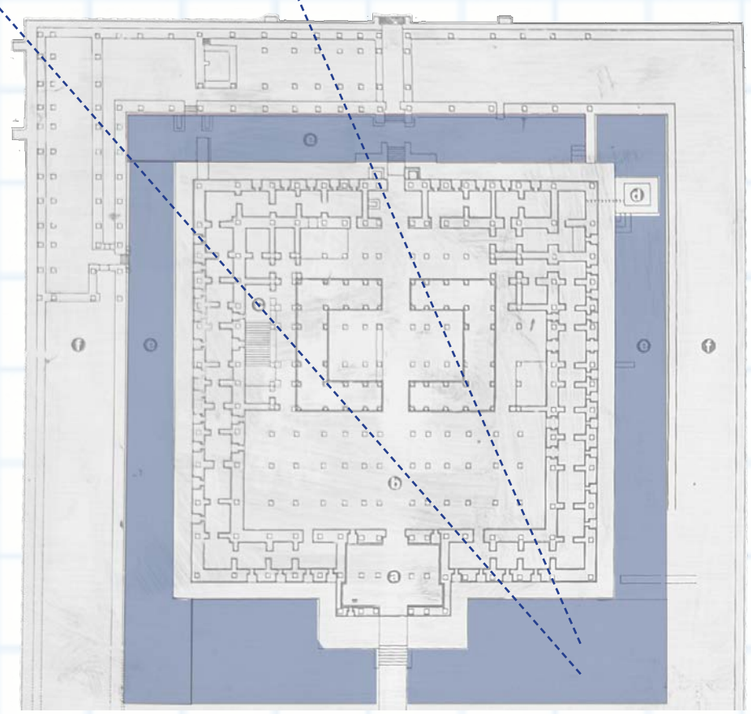
The spatial order reflects a social intent rooted in spiritual hierarchy, collective discipline, and climate responsiveness, where the courtyard functioned as a calm, regulated environment for monastic life.

ANCIENT ERA

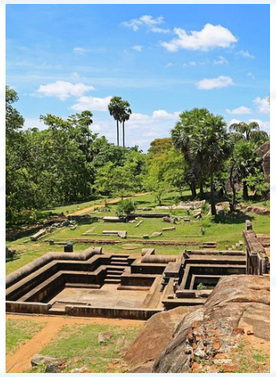
Royal Palace complex of Polonnaruwa

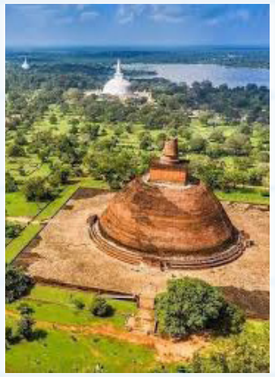
The Royal Palace complex of Polonnaruwa, particularly the palace of King Parakramabahu, employed courtyards to express power, control, and social hierarchy. Forecourts and internal courts structured ceremonial movement, separating public audiences from private royal domains.

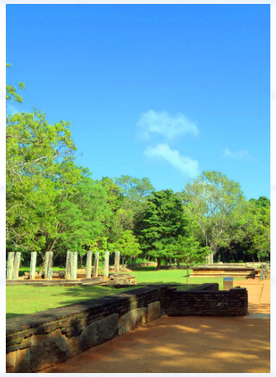
These courtyards were not spaces of egalitarian gathering but instruments of authority and protocol, regulating access and visibility. While still climatically effective, their primary intent was symbolic and administrative rather than contemplative.



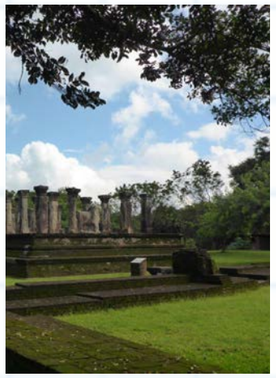
Plan of Royal Palace of Polonnaruwa







Monastic Complexes Of Anuradhapura

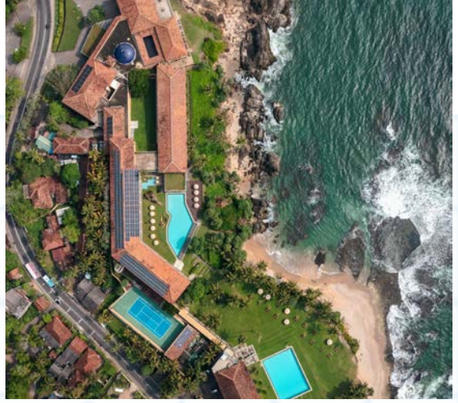


Royal Palace complex of Polonnaruwa

In the ancient period, courtyards were fundamental to social order and everyday functioning, as seen in the monastic complexes of Anuradhapura and the royal palace at Polonnaruwa. In Anuradhapura, monastic courtyards structured collective monastic life, supporting meditation, learning, movement, and climatic comfort within a disciplined inward-facing environment.

Similarly, in Polonnaruwa, palace courtyards organized ceremonial movement and governance, reinforcing hierarchy and authority. In both cases, the courtyard was an essential spatial generator, shaping social behavior, ritual practice, and power relations rather than serving a secondary or aesthetic role.

CONTEMPORARY ERA



Courtyard 4

Courtyard 3

Plan of Jetwing Lighthouse, Galle

Jetwing Lighthouse, Galle

In the contemporary Sri Lankan context, courtyards are reinterpreted as experiential and spatial devices rather than purely social cores. At Jetwing Lighthouse, Galle by Geoffrey Bawa, courtyards are used as a sequence of spatial pauses that structure movement, perception, and emotion.

Instead of one central court, a series of courtyards—circular, rectangular, open-ended, and transitional—mediate between land, ocean, and sky. Their social intent is subtle: they encourage slow movement, contemplation, and shared yet quiet occupation.

Guests interact not through direct social gathering but through shared experience of light, water, breeze, and landscape, making the courtyard a collective sensory space rather than a domestic one.

The hotel is structured around a series of courtyards, not one central court.

Courtyards are used to:

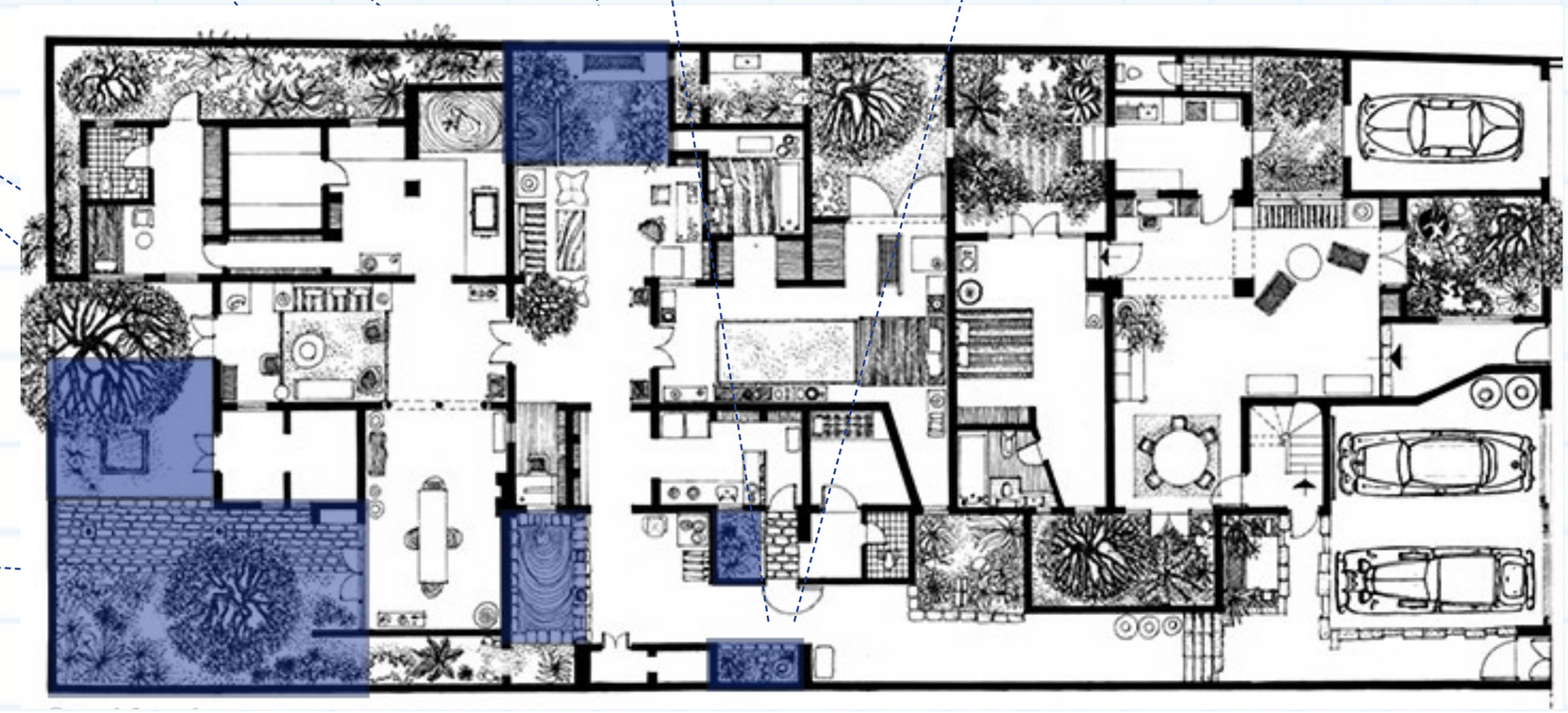
- -Organize circulation
- -Create microclimates
- -Control views and privacy
- -Shape emotional and sensory experience
- -Removing courtyards would collapse the spatial logic of the building.

CONTEMPORARY ERA

House no. 11, Colombo

At House No. 11, the courtyards also operate as instruments of urban survival within an extremely constrained plot. Rather than creating a single social focus, Bawa fragments the courtyard into a series of small, layered voids that regulate light, ventilation, and visual depth.

These spaces slow down movement, encourage pause, and foster a quiet, introspective mode of living. Social interaction is subtle and incidental, reinforcing the idea that in contemporary domestic architecture, the courtyard supports individual reflection and sensory awareness more than collective social rituals.



Plan of Bawa's Residence

CONCLUSION

ANCIENT ERA

In the ancient Sri Lankan context, courtyards were instruments of collective order and social structure, as evident in the royal palace complex of Polonnaruwa and the monastic complexes of Anuradhapura. In Polonnaruwa, courtyards organized power, ritual, and governance—structuring movement between public, semi-public, and restricted zones while accommodating assemblies, ceremonies, and royal administration.

In Anuradhapura's monasteries, courtyards functioned as shared spiritual grounds, supporting communal living, teaching, meditation, and ritual discipline among monks. Here, the courtyard was central, obligatory, and inward-looking, reinforcing collective identity, hierarchy, and a shared cosmological order. Social life unfolded around the courtyard as a necessity rather than a choice.

CONTEMPORARY ERA

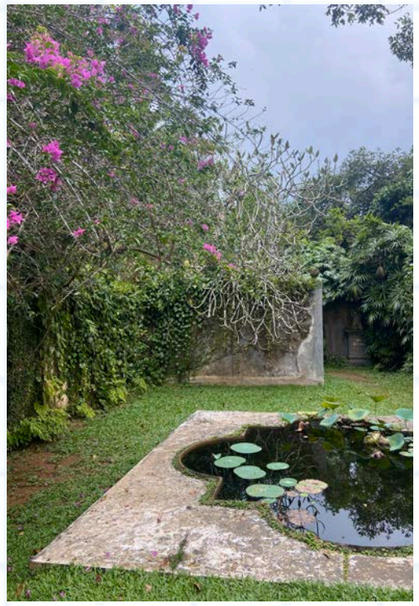
In the contemporary era, as seen in Jetwing Lighthouse, Galle, and Geoffrey Bawa's House No. 11, the social intent of courtyards shifts toward experience, mediation, and individual engagement. At Jetwing Lighthouse, courtyards form a sequence of spatial pauses that guide movement, frame views, and encourage transient social encounters rather than sustained communal life.

In House No. 11, compact courtyards create moments of solitude, reflection, and informal domestic interaction within a dense urban fabric. Across both examples, courtyards are no longer socially prescriptive; instead, they operate as deliberate architectural devices that negotiate privacy, climate, and sensory experience, redefining social intent from collective obligation to curated engagement.

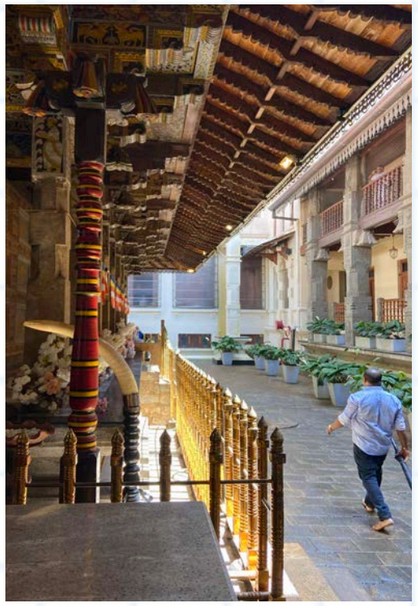
HENCE...

Across Sri Lankan architectural history, courtyards evolve from socially mandatory centers of collective life to carefully curated experiential spaces. In ancient contexts, they structured ritual, hierarchy, and communal living, anchoring social order. In contemporary architecture, courtyards persist not as necessities but as intentional design tools—mediating climate, privacy, movement, and memory—allowing architecture to respond sensitively to changing social patterns while sustaining a deep connection to place and tradition.life unfolded around the courtyard as a necessity rather than a choice.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF COURTYARDS



BEWIS BAWA'S RESIDENCE



TEMPLE OF THE TOOTH

RUHUNU UNIVERSITY

DE SARAM HOUSE

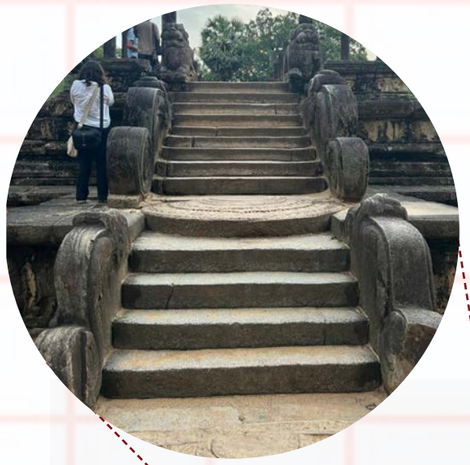
ARCHITECTURE IN BETWEEN:
Transitional Spaces Shaped by Culture, Climate and History

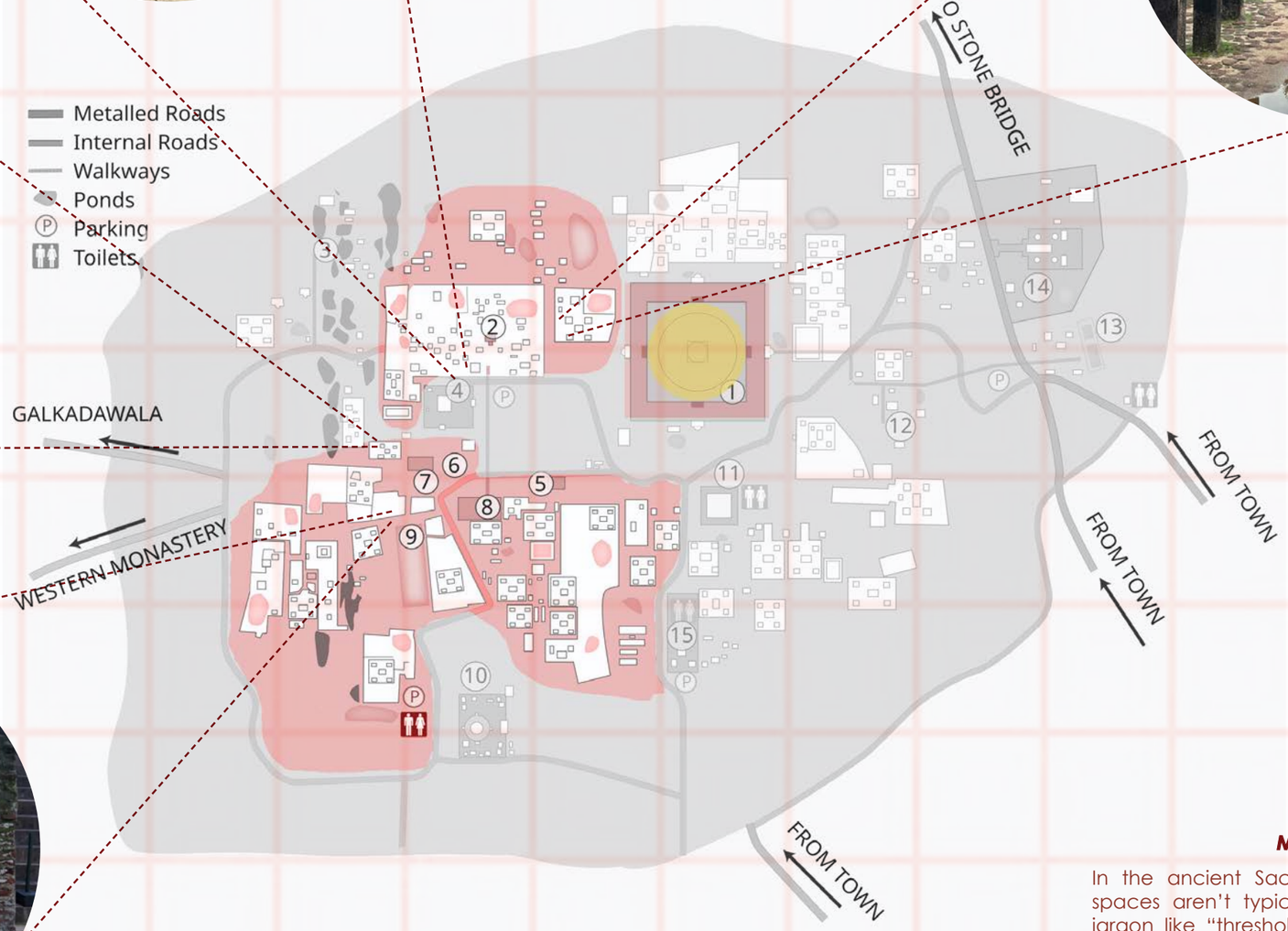
Minisha Bothra | UAR23132

The transitional spaces in Sri Lankan architecture are critical mediators between climate, culture, history and modern identity. Tracing their evolution from ancient Buddhist complexes and colonial structures to contemporary Tropical Modernist works, it reveals how thresholds, courtyards and verandas embody social rituals, political power and environmental intelligence. Rather than functioning as mere connectors, these spaces shape sensory experience and movement, dissolving rigid boundaries between inside and outside. The study positions transitional spaces as autonomous architectural elements, demonstrating how modern Sri Lankan architecture reinterprets inherited spatial traditions to create climate-responsive, culturally grounded and experientially rich environments.

01c

ANCIENT ERA



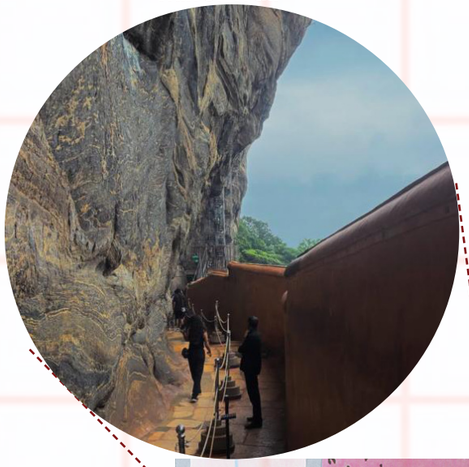


Monastic Complexes Of Anuradhapura

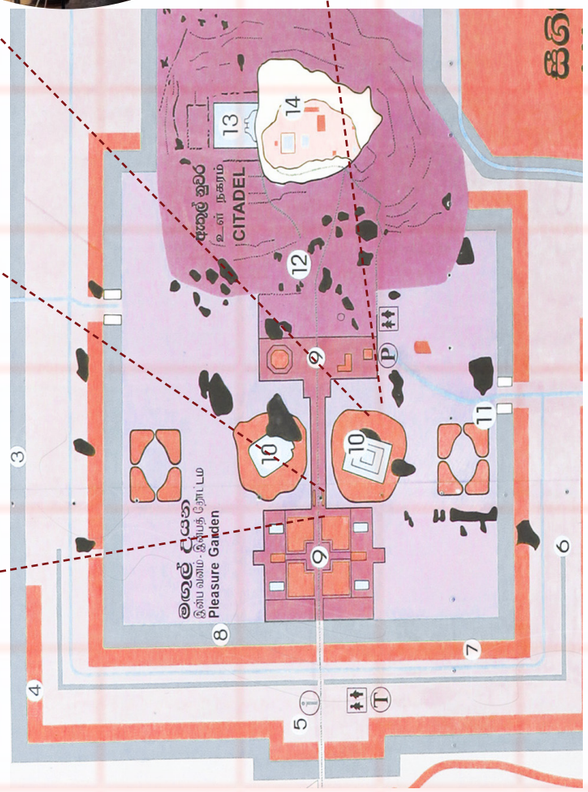
In the ancient Sacred City of Anuradhapura, transitional spaces aren't typically described in modern architectural jargon like "thresholds" or "interstitial zones," but the city's layout and built forms strongly reflect spatial hierarchies and transitions between sacred, communal, and monastic realms. The notion of spatial transition in ancient Buddhist towns like Anuradhapura is rooted in how movement, ritual approach, and symbolic thresholds were organized between open and enclosed spaces — and between the everyday world and the sacred.

ANCIENT ERA

Mirror Wall



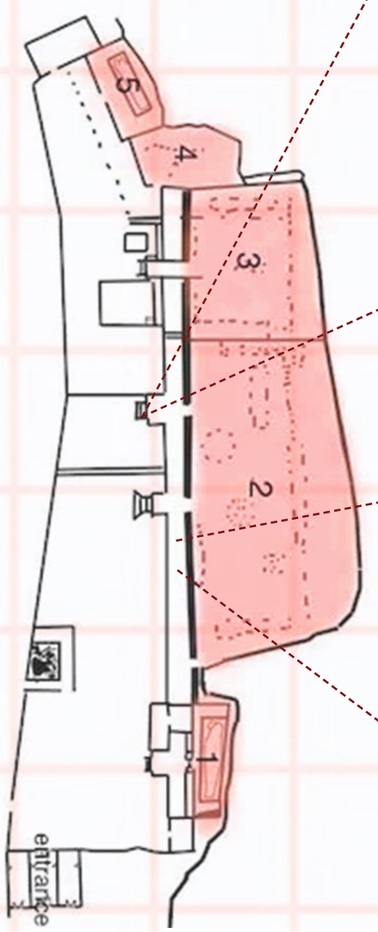
Water Garden



Sigiriya Rock

At Sigiriya, the Water Gardens and Mirror Wall function as deliberate transitional spaces guiding both movement and perception. The Water Gardens mark the shift from natural forest to a controlled, ordered landscape, using symmetry, water, and axial paths to slow movement and prepare visitors mentally for entry into a royal realm. They mediate between the public, secular world and increasingly restricted spaces ahead. The Mirror Wall acts as a liminal corridor, transforming open horizontal movement into a narrow, vertical ascent. Its reflective surface and confined scale heighten self-awareness and pause, marking a psychological and symbolic transition from the earthly domain to the elevated seat of royal power above.

Dambulla Caves`

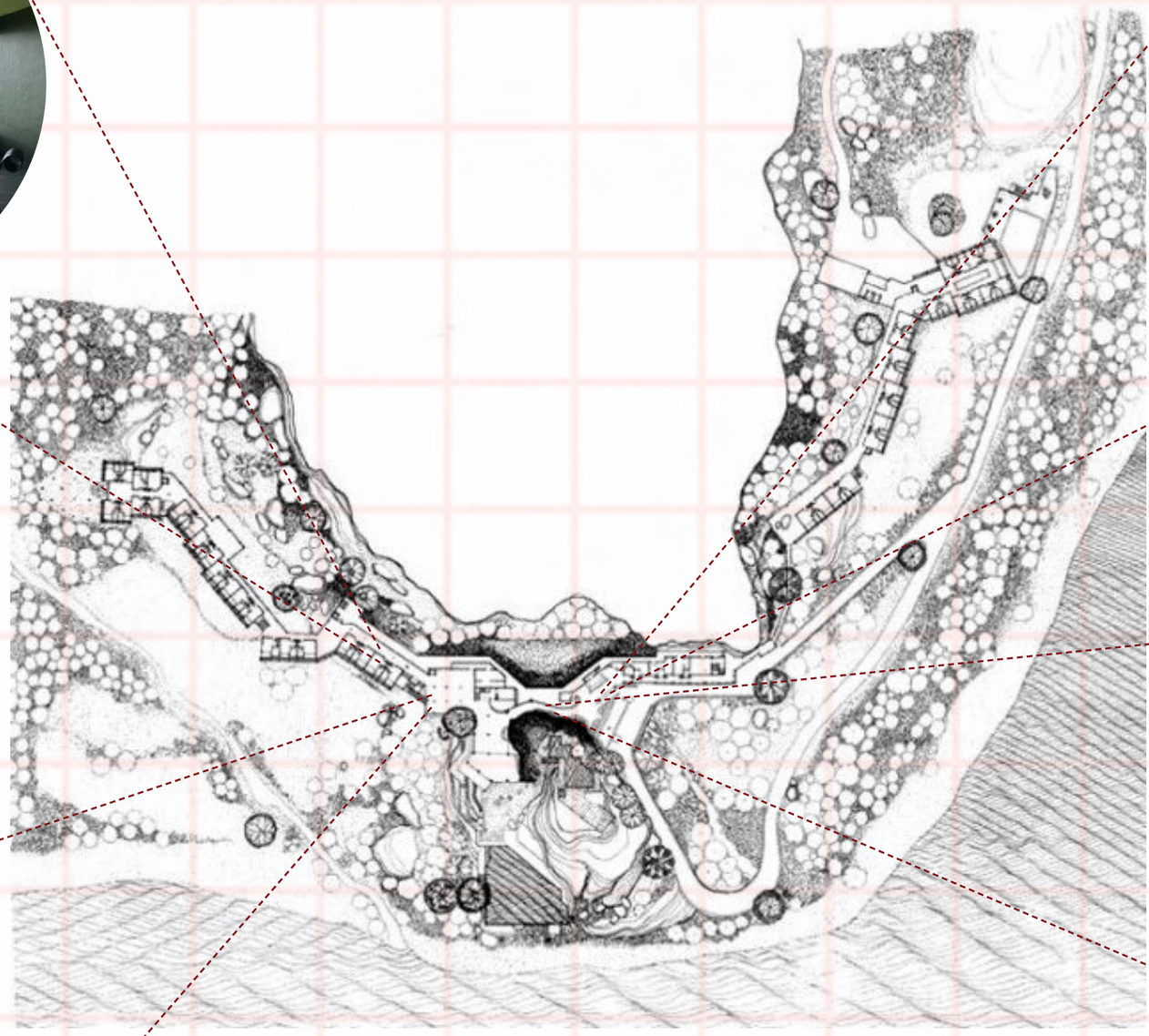


The Five "Caves" of the Dambulla Rock Temple

Dambulla Caves

At the Dambulla Cave Temple, the steps and verandah act as important transitional spaces between the outside world and the sacred cave interiors. The ascent through the steps creates a physical and psychological separation from the secular landscape, preparing visitors for worship. The verandah forms a threshold where light, sound, and temperature gradually shift, allowing the eyes and mind to adjust before encountering the Buddha statues and mural paintings inside. At the same time, the verandah functions as a circulation spine, guiding movement laterally along the rock face and connecting the individual cave shrines. It enables a continuous, ritual sequence between caves while maintaining sacred enclosure..

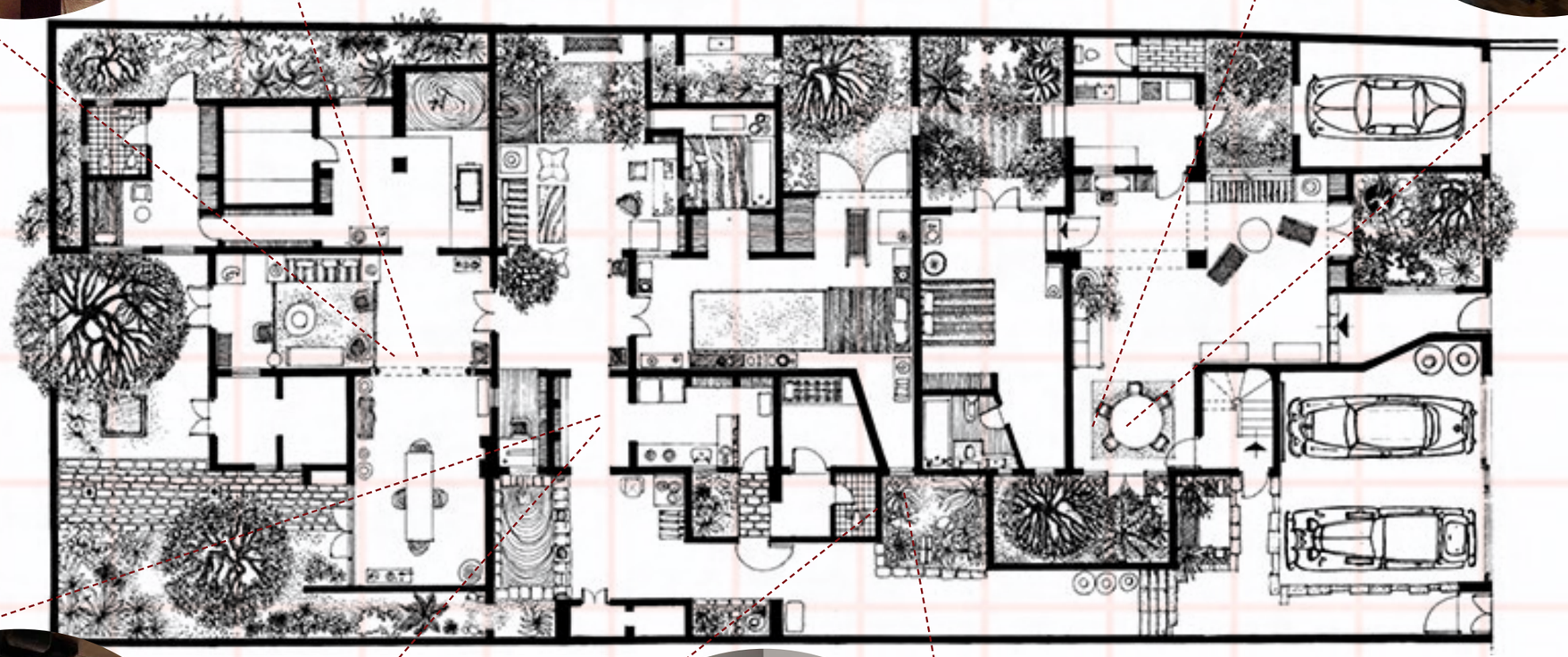
CONTEMPORARY ERA

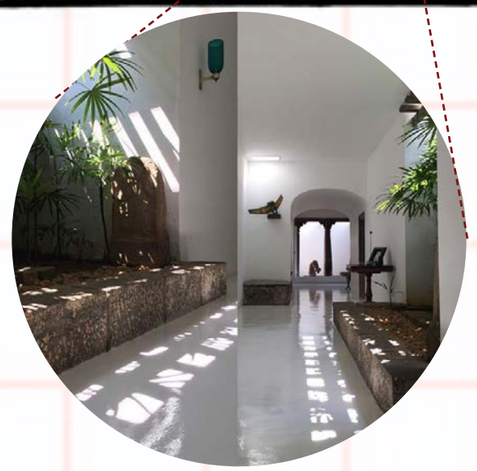


Kandalama Hotel

At Heritance Kandalama, Geoffrey Bawa uses transitional spaces to blur the boundary between architecture and landscape. Long open corridors, terraces, and verandahs act as thresholds between enclosed interiors and the surrounding forest and reservoir. Movement through the hotel is deliberately elongated and indirect, with framed views, changing light, and shifting levels guiding guests gradually from arrival to rooms and public spaces. These transitional zones dissolve the sense of a fixed inside and outside, allowing nature to continuously enter the experience of the building. Rather than abrupt entry, Bawa designs a sequence of spatial transitions that encourage pause, awareness, and immersion, making movement itself a central architectural experience.

CONTEMPERORY ERA





Kandalama Hotel

In House Number 11, Colombo, Geoffrey Bawa uses transitional spaces to structure movement, light, and privacy within a dense urban plot. Courtyards, verandahs, open staircases, and narrow passages act as thresholds between rooms, allowing gradual transitions rather than abrupt separations. These spaces bring daylight and ventilation deep into the house, responding effectively to the tropical climate while maintaining seclusion from the street. Movement is layered and exploratory, with changing levels and framed views creating moments of pause. Drawing from traditional Sri Lankan and colonial precedents, Bawa transforms circulation into lived space, where transitional zones mediate between inside and outside, public and private, shaping everyday experience.

CONCLUSION

ANCIENT ERA

In Anuradhapura and Sigiriya, transitional spaces are fundamental to shaping spiritual, social, and experiential journeys through architecture and landscape. In Anuradhapura, transitional spaces appear as open terraces, courtyards, circumambulatory paths, gardens, and water bodies that mediate between the secular city and sacred Buddhist monuments. Approaches to stupas such as Ruwanwelisaya gradually move devotees from public urban space to ritual precincts, while monastic courtyards and verandahs create shifts from communal activity to meditative enclosure. These layered thresholds slow movement and reinforce spiritual preparation.

At Sigiriya, transitional spaces are more choreographed and symbolic. The Water Gardens form a threshold between the natural forest and a controlled royal landscape, using symmetry, water, and sensory calm to prepare visitors psychologically. The Mirror Wall acts as a liminal corridor, compressing movement and heightening self-awareness during the ascent. Together, Anuradhapura and Sigiriya demonstrate how ancient Sri Lankan architecture used sequence, landscape, and thresholds to guide movement, meaning, and experience.

CONTEMPORARY ERA

In Heritance Kandalama and Number 11 House, Geoffrey Bawa employs transitional spaces as the core architectural strategy, shaping movement and experience rather than treating them as residual areas. At Kandalama, long open corridors, terraces, ramps, and verandahs blur the boundary between interior spaces and the surrounding forest and reservoir. Movement is gradual and meandering, with framed views, changing light, and shifting levels creating a continuous dialogue with the landscape. Transitional spaces here dissolve the distinction between inside and outside, allowing nature to become part of daily experience.

In Number 11 House, transitional spaces are more intimate and inward-looking. Courtyards, open-to-sky stairs, verandahs, and filtered passages mediate between rooms, light, and climate within a dense urban context. These spaces guide movement while allowing ventilation and light to penetrate deep into the house.

The commonality between both projects lies in Bawa's use of transition as experience: layered thresholds, controlled movement, and climatic responsiveness transform circulation into a meaningful spatial journey rather than a mere connector.

HENCE...

Across Sri Lankan architecture—ranging from Anuradhapura, Sigiriya, and Dambulla to modern works by Geoffrey Bawa—transitional spaces emerge as a unifying architectural principle shaped by culture, climate, and history. In ancient sacred cities and monastic complexes, transitional spaces such as terraces, steps, courtyards, water gardens, and verandahs mediated the journey from the secular to the sacred, reinforcing Buddhist ideas of gradual spiritual progression and ritual preparation. At Sigiriya, landscape and movement were carefully choreographed to express power and symbolism, while at Dambulla, thresholds balanced reverence with orientation and continuity.

In modern architecture, these ideas persist through climatic and contextual adaptation. Bawa's Kandalama Hotel and Number 11 House reinterpret traditional thresholds using open corridors, courtyards, and verandahs to respond to tropical climate, landscape, and urban density. Across time, transitional spaces in Sri Lanka are never merely functional; they are experiential, cultural, and environmental mediators that transform movement into meaning, revealing a continuous architectural lineage shaped by place, belief, and lived experience.

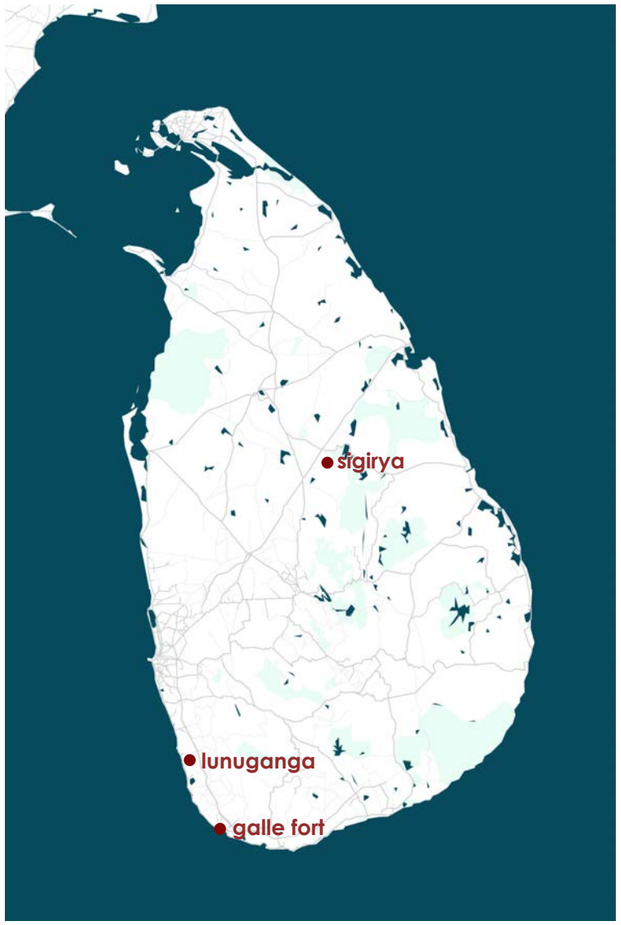
01d

WATER:
A Medium & A Memory

Harini Ganesh | PCR24117

Water silently records the story of Sri Lankan architecture, shaping built form, spatial hierarchy, and social negotiation across centuries. From premodern tanks and ceremonial ponds that structure ritual and authority, to colonial moats and sea defenses that impose boundaries while negotiating climate, water mediates both power and survival. In modern landscapes, water becomes atmosphere and experience, curated and maintained, reflecting selective access and evolving societal values.

Through the lens of water, this narrative is layered into three temporal chapters, where history is not merely told, **but revealed through the liquid traces left upon the land.** Rather than presenting a linear historical progression, each layer reveals how water is repeatedly negotiated, overwritten and reinterpreted within Sri Lanka's built landscape. Across these timelines, **water is not always benevolent. Often romanticized in architectural discourse, it is also an agent of decay causing erosion, vegetation growth and material fatigue.** Through the eyes of a conservation architect, water becomes a narrative device across Sri Lanka's built landscape, revealing how architecture is continuously layered, negotiated, and reinterpreted over time.



“Water is the island’s silent narrator, shifting from a symbol of royal authority to a medium of atmosphere and eventually, a poetic agent of decay and memory.”

from ceremonial ponds at Sigiriya to an experiantial medium at Lunuganga

what's the story?

In the tropical landscape of Sri Lanka, ***water is cast as a sentient scribe,*** an autobiography of power and surrender is written by its hand upon the built. To read the architecture, it must be asked: ***how is the story of a place shaped by water?***

And so, for this story to be rightly read, the clues left behind must be sought. The existing must be looked beyond to find the ***Threshold (Boundary), the Perception (Stain), and the Pulse (Sound)***. These are the threads by which water is revealed as the most active architectural narrator of Sri Lanka.

The site is interrogated not for its form, but for the way the water's edge is manipulated to either exclude or invite, how the memory of the rain is interpreted as either a scar or a patina, and how the very air is vibrated by a liquid voice that is either commanded to roar or allowed to whisper.

boundary

The spatial logic of the water's edge, determining whether water acts as a wall of exclusion or a porous gateway for the landscape around it.

stain

The physical residue of water on material and how the "scarring" of the building is interpreted by the society.

sound

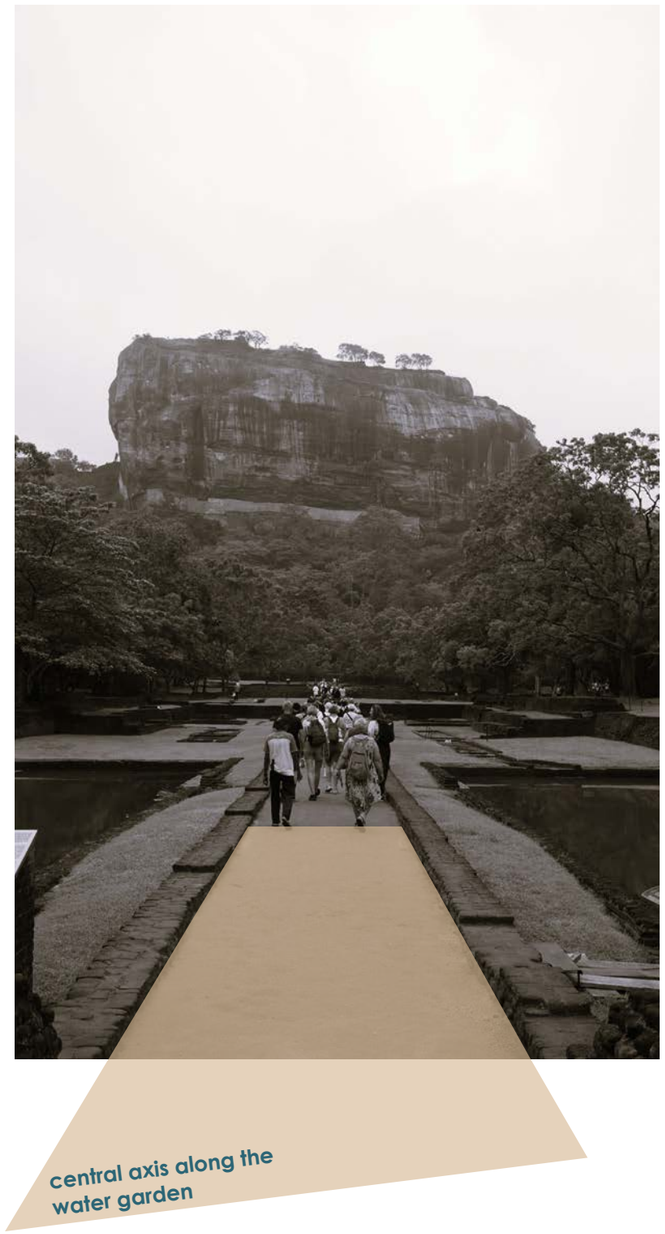
The acoustic character of water, created by its volume and its collision with different surfaces (stone, coral, or earth).

sigiriya

LAYER 01: Historic Layer

Located in the central Matale District, Sigiriya is a colossal rock fortress and city serving as a citadel. Here, King Kasyapa did not just live atop a 200-meter rock, he lived within a hydraulic machine designed to prove that even the heavens could be harnessed.

At Sigiriya, ***water is a tool of authoritative choreography.*** As one walks through the citadel the ***axial tanks, terraces, and channels choreograph movement, ritual, and surveillance***, embedding social hierarchy within the landscape. These hydraulic interventions are not merely functional but they are also architectural events, ***materializing power and belief in stone and water.***



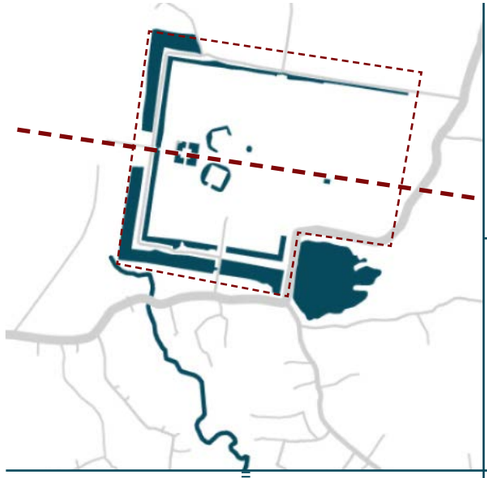
Water as a tool of authoritative choreography

Tanks materializing power and belief in stone and water.

Water Garden that serves as the tank

"the axial tanks, terraces, and channels choreograph movement, ritual, and surveillance"

Water Channels theat acts as the evidence of the mastery of hydralic machinery



Boundary: Hierarchy
Axial surveillance

Stain: Permenance
Material deposits on stone

Sound: Rhythmic
Acoustic signature of hydraulic mastering

galle fort

LAYER 02: Colonial Layer

Travel south to the coast, where the story changes to one of fortification. Galle Fort is a colonial machine of extraction, its thick coral-stone walls designed to ***separate the civilized interior from the wild exterior.***

In Galle, ***water is reframed as boundary, defense, and extraction.*** Moats, sea walls, and canals attempt to assert colonial order, yet the tropical climate and ***saline exposure resist domination.*** The sea and moat enforce separation, while thickened walls resist climate and control access. Social hierarchy is spatialised through access: who lives within the fort, who labours outside it, and who controls the harbour.

“Water is reframed as boundary, defense, and extraction”

"its thick coral-stone walls designed to separate the civilized interior from the wild exterior."

"The sea and moat enforce separation, while thickened walls resist climate and control access."

Boundary: Exclusion
The defensive moat

Stain: Resistance
Salt bursting & Dampness

Sound: Threat

The crash of the waves on the surface

lunuganga

LAYER 03: Tropical Modernism Layer

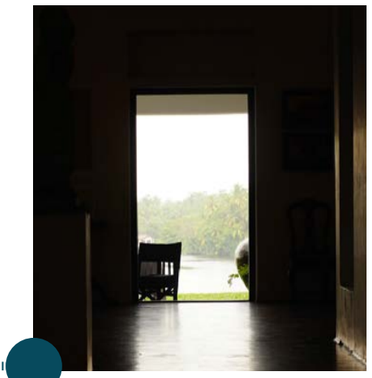
Retreat to the banks of Dedduwa Lake, to the riverine quiet of Lunuganga, a 20th-century private country estate. Here, the struggle is over. The architecture and landscape no longer seeks to command the water or resist the sea, ***it simply yields, creating curoisty.***

Water is ***experiential, atmospheric, and mutable.*** Pools, streams, and algae-streaked terraces dissolve edges, invite immersion, and embrace decay. The stain of algae and moses is reinterpretaed as patina as an intentional, ***living archive of the building's surrender to time***, while the sound shifts to a singular, meditative drip.

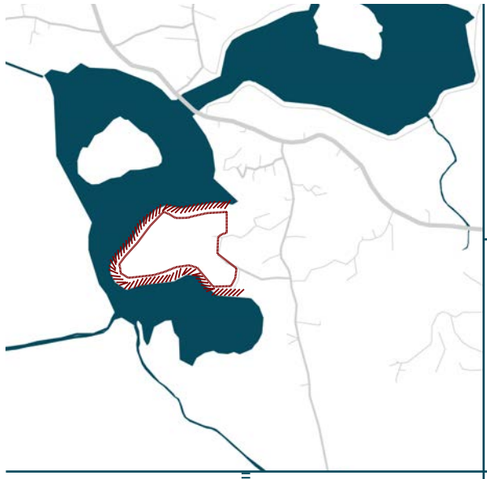
Water is experiential, atmospheric, and mutable.

Curated landscape, yielding to nature

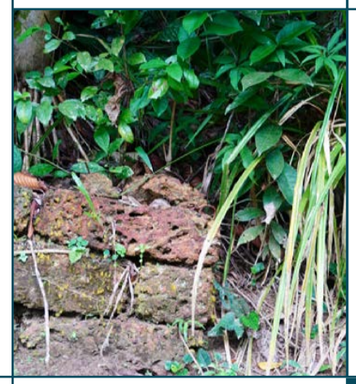
"architecture & landscape no longer seeks to command the water or resist the sea, it simply yields, creating curoisty."



Curating Views from various points on the site

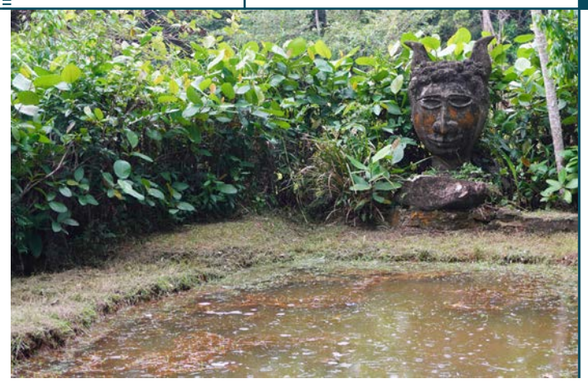


Boundary: Immersion
Dissolved edge



Stain: Embrace

The algae and the moss are living archives, recording the beautiful, slow surrender of the built form back into the earth.



Sound: Intospection
The quiet drop

In this tropical landscape, architecture is not a finished monument, but a continuous negotiation, a story forever being rewritten by the very water it seeks to hold.

02

Continuity & Disjunction

Group 2
Ankuri, Atri, Cyriac, Vishnu

Continuity and Disjunction approaches sites across Sri Lanka through the lens of architectural time rather than stylistic or chronological classification. Moving from precolonial cities and sacred landscapes to colonial and tropical modern buildings, the narrative traces how continuity is sustained alongside moments of rupture, overlap, and transformation. It reflects on how spatial systems, material strategies, and patterns of inhabitation persist, adapt, or break across periods. Rather than reading architecture as a sequence of isolated historical moments, the work understands it as a layered condition, where past and present coexist and inform one another.

TRAVELLER IS THE TIME KEEPER

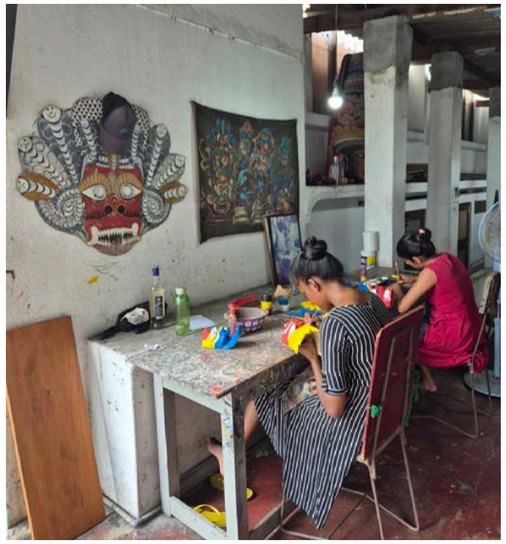
Atri Karmakar| PAT24057

Sri Lankan architecture can be read through multiple layers of time: the slow formation of ancient settlements, the conjunction of cultural & colonial ideas, the lived experience of space, the ongoing time of maintenance, and new growth.

Time after time, Sri Lanka has been influenced with outsourced cultures and beliefs which today, is either commemorated or continuing. Time is also experienced by the traveller through movement and perception, while ancient, medieval and modern surroundings reveal time through decay, repair, and upkeep.

02a

The journey was a mixed bag of time-travels, unsequential to progressing timeline, and thus I, the traveller was the time keeper.



My trip started a little early than the schedule dates for the winter course itinerary, curious to explore what was not mentioned in the specified route. A side quest towards south of Bentota- at Ambalangoda, led us to know what would be the remains of pre-Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka. Ambalangoda remains as a place for making traditional masks. Various colored and expressive masks were used to personify different beliefs and lores like hunger, fever, famine, unwanted pregnancy etc. For protection, they would believe in five characters- NagaRaksha, GuruluRaksha, GiniRaksha, MayuraRaksha, & MaruRaksha, associated with demons of cobra, eagle, fire, peacock, and death, respectively. Truly felt as a prelude to the trip and the culture of Sri Lanka.

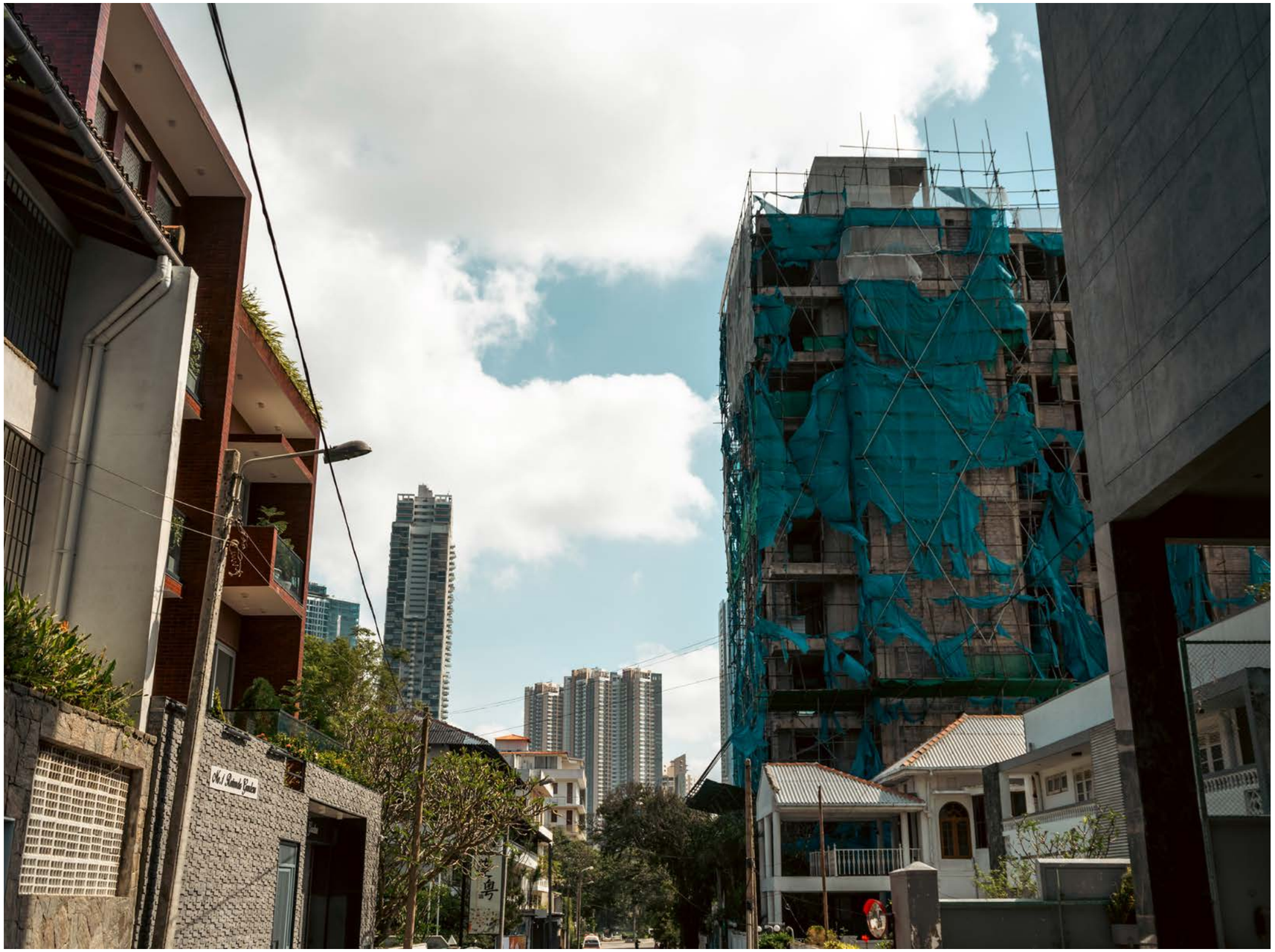
Colombo

(Capital since 1815)

Colombo was our first halt for four days where we mostly encountered the modern and post-modern architecture and culture. The city showcases strings of multiple timelines and religions, all thriving in the nation's capital. It's home to the 2000 year old ship harbour, Red Mosque, Pettah market, old churches, authentic and exotic food, and late night bars and casinos.

Towering skyscrapers would sometimes shoot up right beside an old house or abandoned plot, telling how the city is evolving organically. In the somewhat crashing economy of today, China is funding the country and simultaneously helping build infrastructure for the future. One can encounter a lot of Chinese people and restaurants which were not so common even in the last decade.

-Streets of Colombo with old and new architecture.



Top to bottom-

-Buddha Statues at GangaRamaya temple.

-Heritage buildings in Colombo.

-New skyscrapers near Beira lake.

Facing page-

-Jami Ul-Alfar Mosque in Colombo.

-Vintage cars spotted in Colombo.

House 11, Colombo

(1959-1998)

Visit to Geoffrey Bawa's own residence was the perfect way to know the popular architect- how he functions and getting to know his work space. The house very brilliantly showcases and hides the aspects of time simultaneously.

House 11, as it's named, is an assimilation of four-part houses into a big one. The irony is, if no one ever told this fact, one would think Bawa built one big house!

The coming together of the plots hides only in trivia. The finishes are maintained with utmost care, extending life; till it dies. The trees shooting through light shafts and courtyards showcase them thriving with the structure.

Drop by drop, the water bodies are continuously fed, a sense of passing time as one sits in the living room. Light itself becomes a clock, sliding through trellises, pooling in courts, retreating again, marking hours without any need for a dial.

Top-

-Letterbox from the original House 11 plot before expansion.

Facing page-

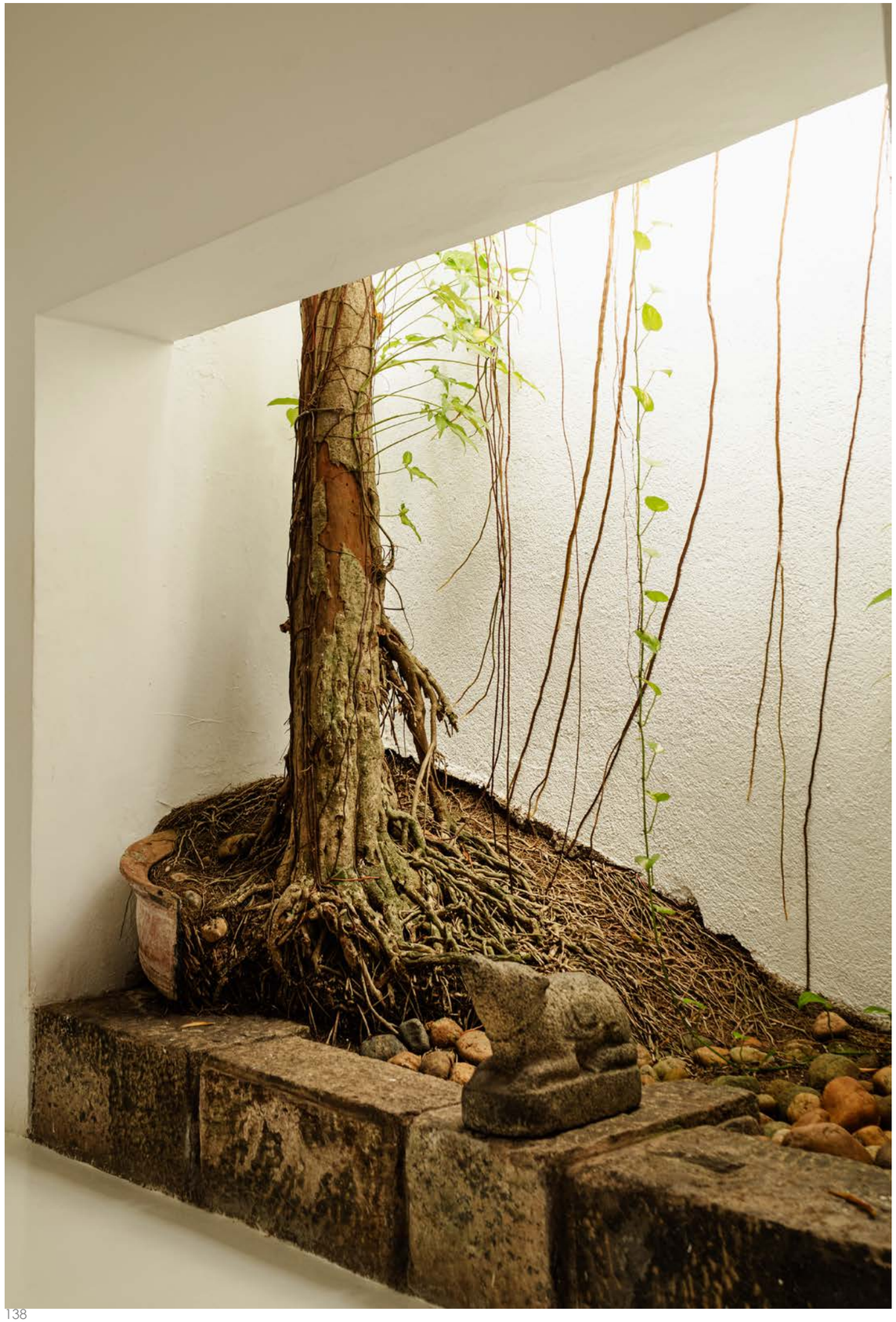
-Corridor from the garage.

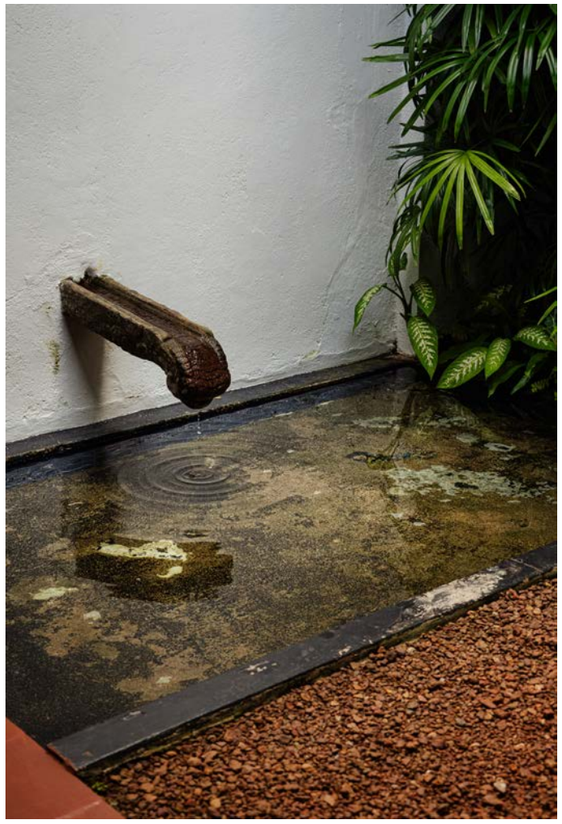
Top-

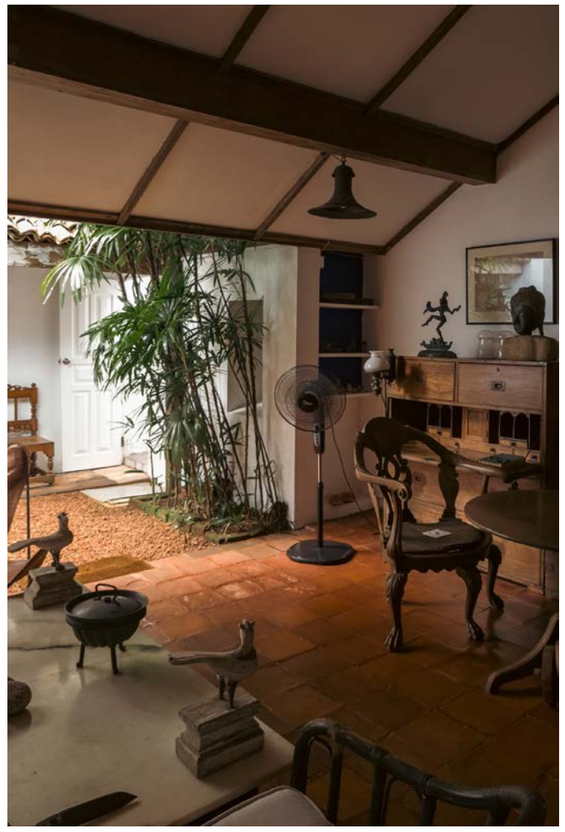
-Clerestorey & Skylight letting in filter light.

Facing page-

-Sun door at garage.







Top-

-View from living room.

Facing page-

-Tree roots breaking out from the pot

One common roof hides all stories beneath it. Looking down from the terrace, it may only occur that it is a continuous home.

Facing page-

-Dining table at the terrace.

This page-

- Photographs of the pitchedd roof with surrounding courtyards.

Dambulla Caves

(1st century BCE)

Our journey led to Dambulla, where from we ventured to ancient civilizations, responsible for propagating Buddhism in Ceylon.

At Dambulla caves, what stood out was a strange, beautiful collage of time. White painted facades carry memories of the Portuguese and Dutch influence, with clear Singhalese motifs. The facade seems to be both marking the establishment of colonial rule, while also protecting the caves. The above great rock waits, unchanged. The copper roof, laid in the Kandy style, has grown a soft green patina, quietly recording years of weather.

Inside, time feels carefully tended. The Jataka tales are not relics but living surfaces, repainted and restored so their stories remain legible. The many Buddha statues too are repaired, re-gilded, maintained as devotional presence.

Time here, isn't that eroded meaning, but what renewed it. History is continuously cared for, layer by layer, gesture by gesture, generation by generation.

-White Painted facade
at Dambulla caves.

-Resting Buddha inside the cave.

Facing page-

-Entrace structure with Kandy style roofing.

-Inside 2nd &the biggest cave.

-Inside 3rd cave.

This page-

- The cave, copper roof with patina and the white facade.

-Sigiriya Rock at daybreak.

Sigiriya Rock

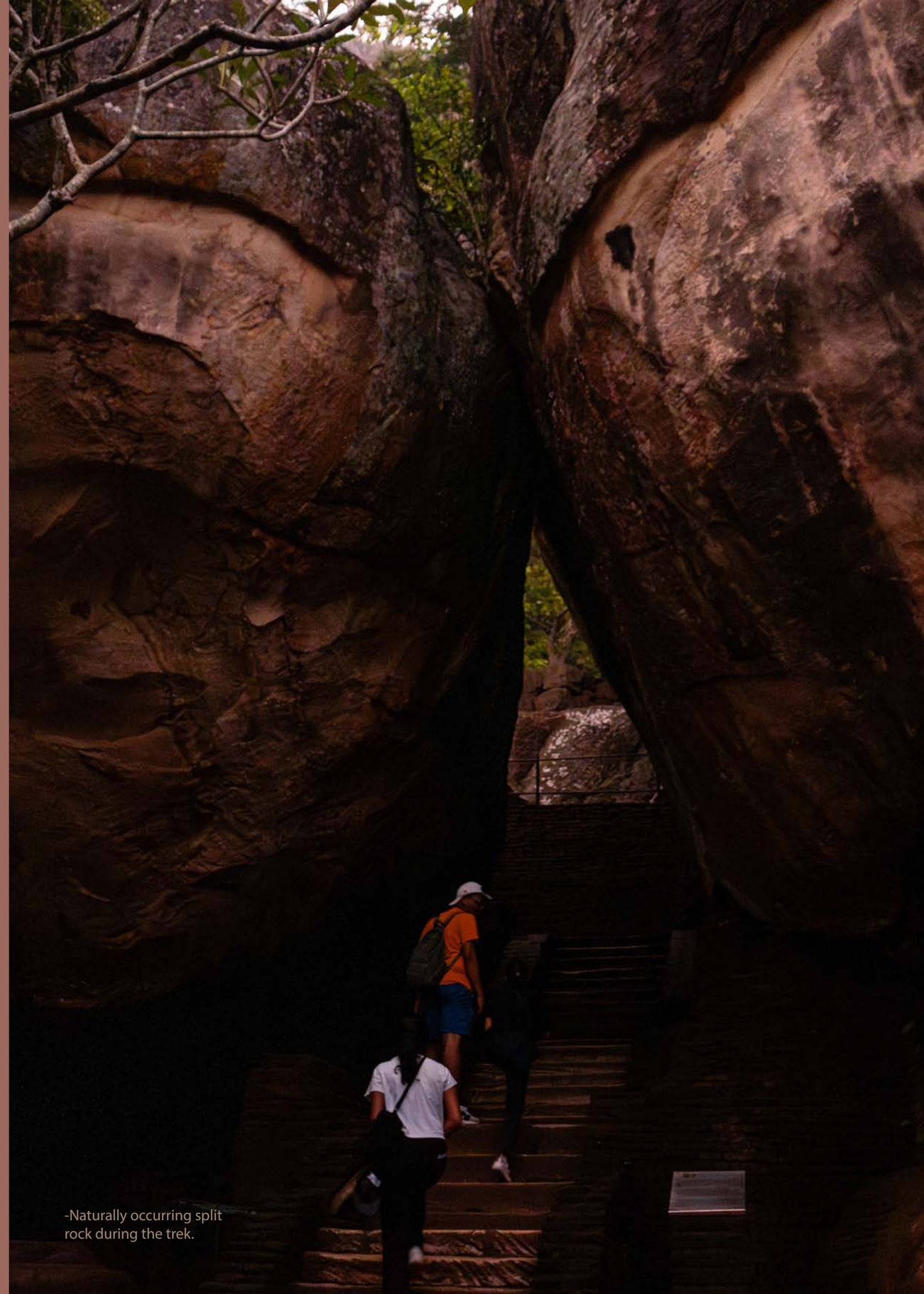
(5th century AD)

Climbing up the Sigiriya rock, the traveller kept thinking about how strangely fast this place must have come into being. King Kashyapa did not create the rock, he found it. A 200-metre monolith already rising from the plain, already commanding the horizon, already monumental. What might have taken generations to build elsewhere was instantly present here in stone. By moving his capital from Anuradhapura to Sigiriya in the 5th century, Kashyapa used geological time to accelerate political time, turning a natural formation into a palatial, defensive, and symbolic centre almost overnight.

And yet, everything else around it took immense patience. The gardens unfold slowly, terraced lawns, water channels, fountains, pools -all shaped, aligned, and calibrated over years so that water could move gently through the landscape by gravity alone.

Time is still carefully tended here. The lawns are manicured with devotion. Moss is gently cleaned from walls. Signs asking not to step on remains of walls out of respect. The site is not just preserved, it's cared for.

Standing there, thought of the lawns at Lunuganga were evoked, where buildings sit within the gardens. It feels impossible that Sigiriya did not somehow linger in Bawa's imagination; the idea of inhabiting a garden, of letting nature be the dominant structure, and of allowing time to soften and complete what architecture only begins.



-Naturally occurring split rock during the trek.

Facing page-

-View from the summit.

This page-

-Workers actively
cleaning the lawns.

Top-

-Maintained lawns with remains of walls.

Facing page-

-A monkey crosses by the pathway with rock in background.

Next page

-Water body with reflections,

Before exploring other areas, we did a short visit to architect Vijitha Basnayake's home, where we had discussions about his beliefs of building much rationally for basic human needs. He believes to build only enough to let humans take shelter, live and embrace nature around the built. His take on society is idealistic, but felt impractical for the present.

Heritance Kandalama

(1992-1995)

We jumped time-line to visit the Kandalama hotel. Bawa was offered a site close to Sigiriya rock which he refused and proposed a site across the Kandalama tank looking towards the sigiriya rock to add more mystery and suspense.

The privately owned 'Island' paper raised concerns over the effect on the water supply and the site ecology but also argued that the project would promote immorality, while the Government owned Daily News favoured the development as an economic boost to the local community. Ultimately, economic rationality prevailed over religious morality and the project was not shelved.

Bawa, being a non Singhalese may have influenced the decision of the colonial Government.

Heavy foliage was added as a skin to dissolve the building into the edge of the cliff; time was needed to let nature engulf the building eventually. The only physical conttact apart from the pool deck is the reception. The building very meticulously controls how and when a person 'disembarks the ship in the forest'. It's very carefully made to contain people inside. The building is not designed to be looked at, but to look from.

Time is needed to let the building dissappear. Time is taken by the traveller to look out into the adjacent rocks and distant sceneries from the corridors and pause points. However does the building eventually engulf with time? Or has the massive 1km long built mass done its damage and nature has to evolve around it?

-Hide and seek of the building elevation.

-Verandah space in corridor looking out towards Dambulla caves.

-Looking out from built frames.

This page-

-Shadows casted by trees on the building from the hillside.

-Foundations integrated with the rocks.

Facing page-

-Foliage growing on the building surface.

Next page-

-The cave Bawa 'designed' for sitouts behind the rooftop restaurant.

Anuradhapura

(377 BCE-1017 CE)

Anuradhapura represents time as continuity and endurance. Established as the first major capital of Sri Lanka around the 4th century BCE, it functioned for over a millennium as a political, religious, and infrastructural centre. Its urban form is expansive and porous: monasteries, reservoirs, stupas, and settlements are distributed across a wide landscape. The city is structured around water- vast tanks, canals, and spillways that enabled agriculture, sustained populations, and stabilized the environment over centuries.

Time is like a ritual in maintenance, since the time it was found from a ruin. The Bodhi tree is replanted from cuttings, which becomes a living marker of continuity of the holy origin. Restoration here is conservative and cyclical. Structures like the stupas have been repaired, rebuilt, and cleaned. They are used today like the time it may have been during its peak.

-Remains of the Jetavana
Assembly hall.

Next page-

-Jethawanaramaya Stupa.
Height- 122m

Top-

-Ruwanweli Maha Seya. This 140-BCE stupa is an ancient, sacred Buddhist site & reaches a height of 103 meters.

Facing page-

-A monk offering prayers.

Polonnaruwa

(1070-1212 AD)

Knowing Polonnaruwa's history, it did represent time as restructuring. When it replaced Anuradhapura as capital in the 11th century, it was conceived as a more compact, rationally organized city. The urban fabric is denser, more formal, and hierarchical. Royal precincts, religious complexes, and civic infrastructure are spatially ordered, reflecting a centralized and administratively focused state.

Time is legible through rupture. The shift of the capital marks a political decision to reframe power spatially and symbolically. The city's abandonment was also more abrupt, leading to long periods of decay before archaeological recovery.

Today, Polonnaruwa is experienced primarily as a curated ruin, whereas Anuradhapura remains a living sacred city.

-Remains of the
royal Palace of King
Parakramabahu.

Top-

-3m thick load bearing brick wall for the massive height.

Facing page-

-Walls showing possible wind shafts for ventialtion and insulation.

Next page-

-Vatadage. It is believed to have been built during the reign of Parakramabahu I to hold the Relic of the tooth of Buddha or during the reign of Nissanka Malla of Polonnaruwa to hold the alms bowl used by Buddha.

-Gal Vihara. Ancient Sinhalese rock temple with 4 Buddha statues, including 2 seated, 1 standing & 1 reclining.

Lunuganga
(1948-1998)

Gardens that was not just made.
Gardens that are still being made.

Geoffrey Bawa spent around five decades, slowly, steadily crafting each corner he would find pleasing at this 25 acre estate. Not to mention, the many sit-out spots he made, there exists opportunities to create even more. Rubber extraction was stopped after purchasing the plot. He would slice some trees from the middle to prevent neighbours from stealing lumber.

Wait. Wait for a tree to cast the right shadow. Wait for a hedge to reach the height that frames the horizon. Wait for moss to soften stone, for water to stain steps, for the land to forget the violence of intervention.

Receive. One can see the entire estate in a fifteen-minute brisk walk, but it takes months to absorb the moods it offers.

A choreograph! Morning light is caught by eastern slopes, afternoon heat settles into shaded verandahs, and the evening horizon is carefully released between two trees that were once saplings. The traveller walks through the multiple curations Bawa has sprinkled across the site waiting to be discovered.

Lunuganga submits to the site. It accepts that growth will exceed design, decay will soften edges. The garden is a conversation between intention, growth, control and surrender.

Time feels like a collaborator, its editor, and ultimately, its author.

-Tall rubber trees cutting sunlight
before hitting the ground.

-Butterfly pond. Bawa would come here to think and clear his mind.

This page-

-The checkered patches of grass as the river edge.

-The famous leopard statue.

Facing page-

-Layers of water bodies.

-Bawa's private bungalow.

-Frangipani tree outside the bungalow.

-Stretch of the lawn seen from the bungalow.

-Water covering alternate checkers after rain.

How does Lunuganga remain both wandering and held?

Why do vines drift while lawns are trimmed, moss gathers while edges are kept?

Is this garden moving forward or paused in a chosen moment, keeping change alive without letting it slip away?

Care as a Way of Reading

Ankuri Patel | PCR24033

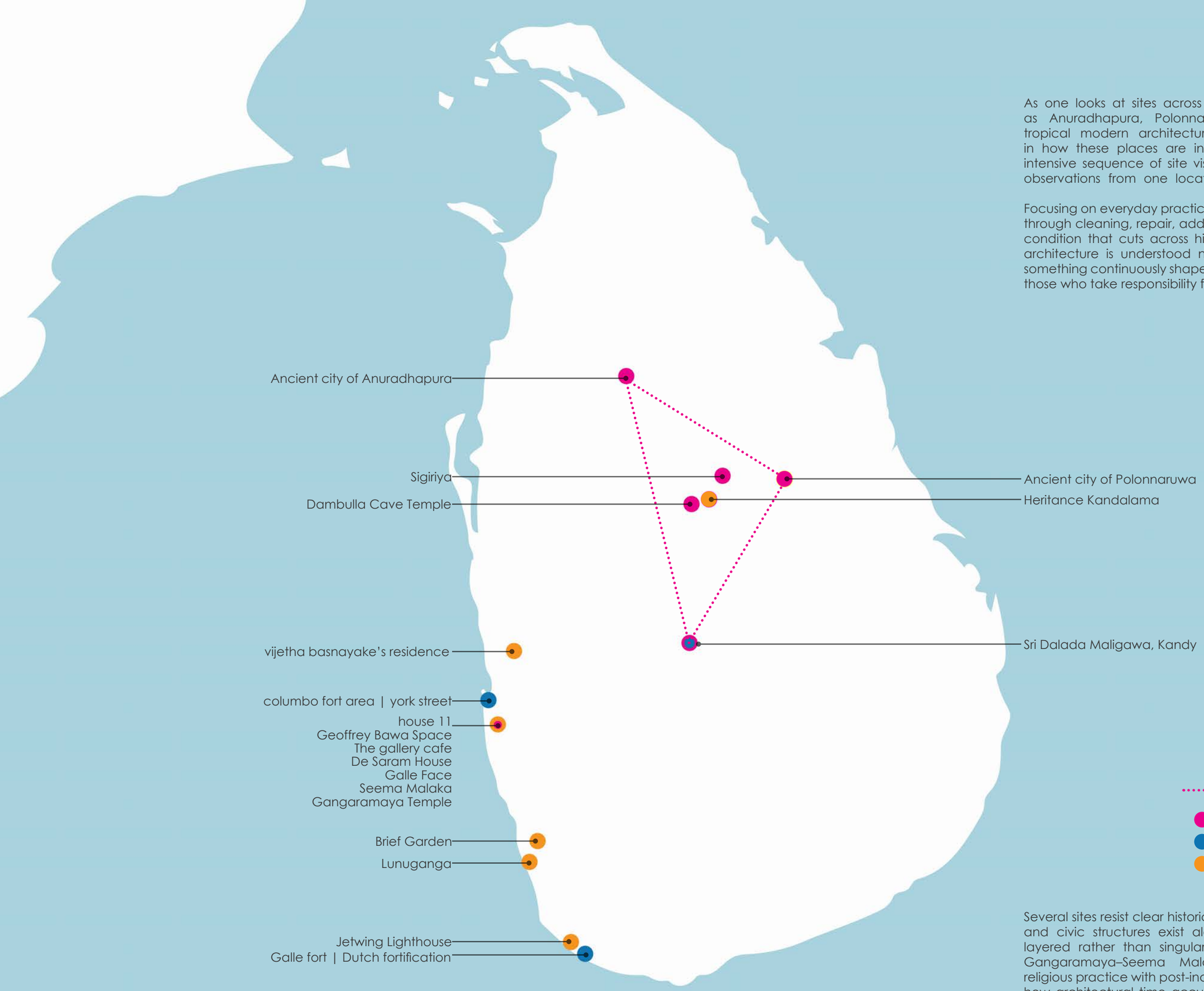
Care as a Way of Reading approaches sites across Sri Lanka through the lens of maintenance, repair, and custodianship rather than stylistic or chronological classification. Moving from precolonial cities and sacred landscapes to colonial and tropical modern buildings, the essay identifies care as a recurring condition that sustains architecture over time. It reflects on how practices of maintenance shift in visibility, responsibility, and labour. Inspired by Shannon Mattern, the narrative reads architecture as something continuously negotiated and kept alive through everyday acts of upkeep and repair.

02b

Reading Across Time

As one looks at sites across Sri Lanka, from precolonial cities such as Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Sigiriya to colonial and tropical modern architecture, recurring patterns become visible in how these places are inhabited and cared for. The short yet intensive sequence of site visits allows connections to emerge, with observations from one location shaping the reading of the next.

Focusing on everyday practices of use, maintenance, and adjustment through cleaning, repair, additions, and acts of care reveals a shared condition that cuts across historical periods. Through these actions, architecture is understood not as a fixed historical object, but as something continuously shaped through use and upkeep, sustained by those who take responsibility for its continuity.



Cultural triangle of Sinhalese civilization

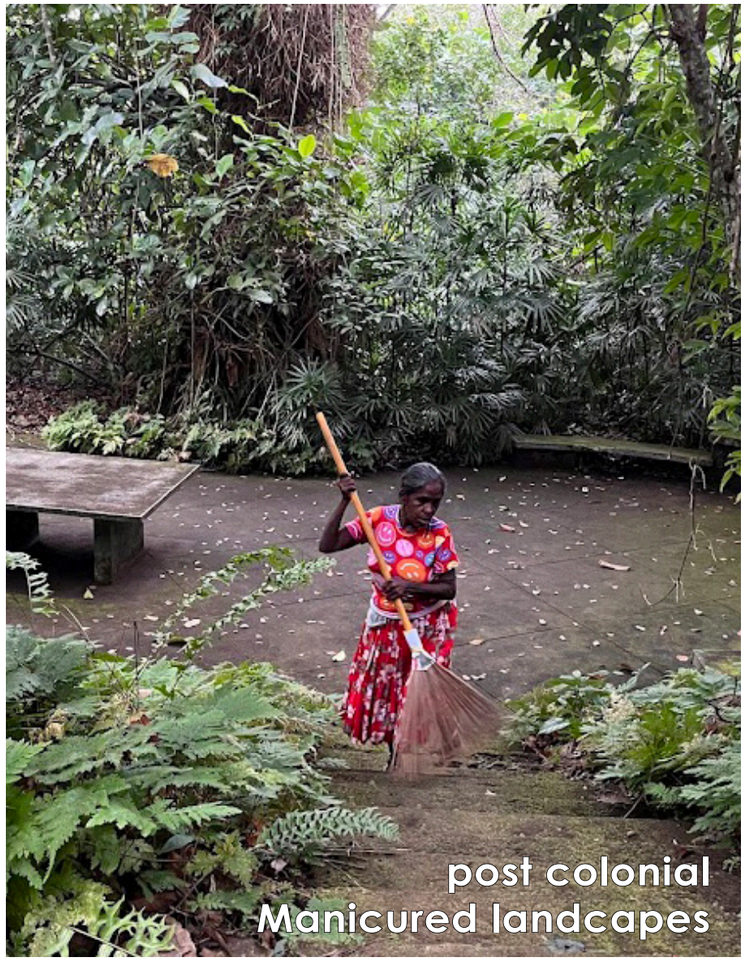
Pre-colonial

Colonial

Post-independence / tropical modern

Several sites resist clear historical division. In Kandy, precolonial sacred and civic structures exist alongside colonial insertions, creating a layered rather than singular architectural condition. Likewise, the Gangaramaya–Seema Malaka complex combines precolonial religious practice with post-independence architectural form, showing how architectural time accumulates through ongoing maintenance and custodianship.

Sites Visited Across Sri Lanka



Places Under Constant Care

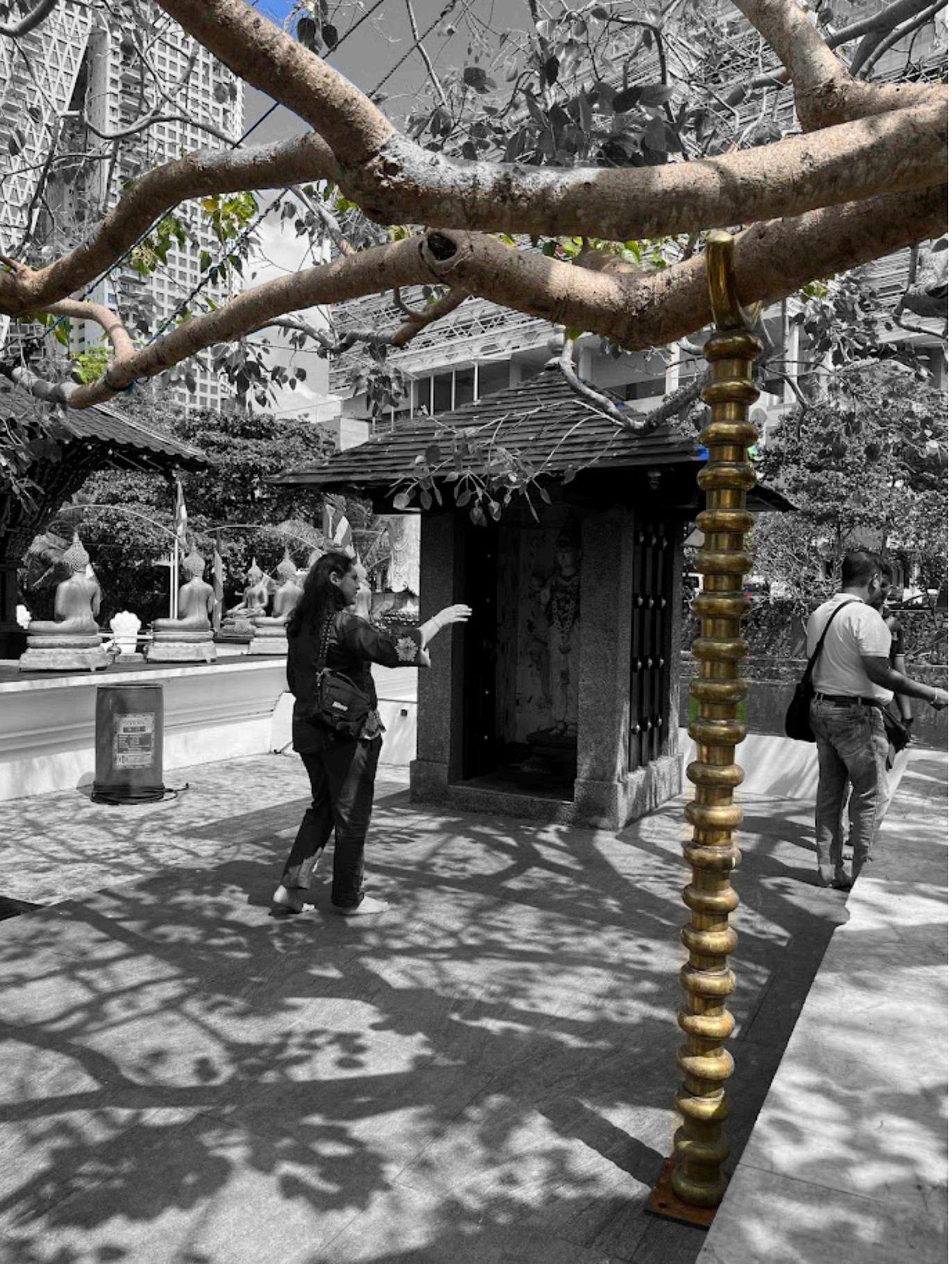
A strong continuity that emerges across these sites is care. These places do not appear finished or frozen in time, but instead as environments that are continuously worked on. Precolonial water systems in Sigiriya, Anuradhapura, and Polonnaruwa have endured only through sustained maintenance practices such as desilting, regulating water flow, and clearing vegetation. Without this ongoing labour, both the architecture and the landscape would cease to function.

In the present, everyday acts such as clearing leaves in sacred spaces continue to be undertaken with seriousness and intent. These practices resemble custodianship rather than preservation, reflecting an understanding that a place remains alive only when responsibility for its care is actively assumed. This reading aligns with Shannon Mattern's work on maintenance and care, which redirects attention from moments of creation to the ongoing labour that sustains places over time.

The role of custodianship

Custodianship emerges as a crucial condition through which care is sustained across these sites. Architecture in these contexts appears to operate on the assumption that responsibility for upkeep will be continuously taken on, whether through daily cleaning, seasonal maintenance, or periodic repair. This role extends beyond formal preservation to include ongoing acts of attention that keep spaces functional, legible, and meaningful. Custodianship thus implies a long-term relationship between people and place, in which buildings are inherited and actively looked after.

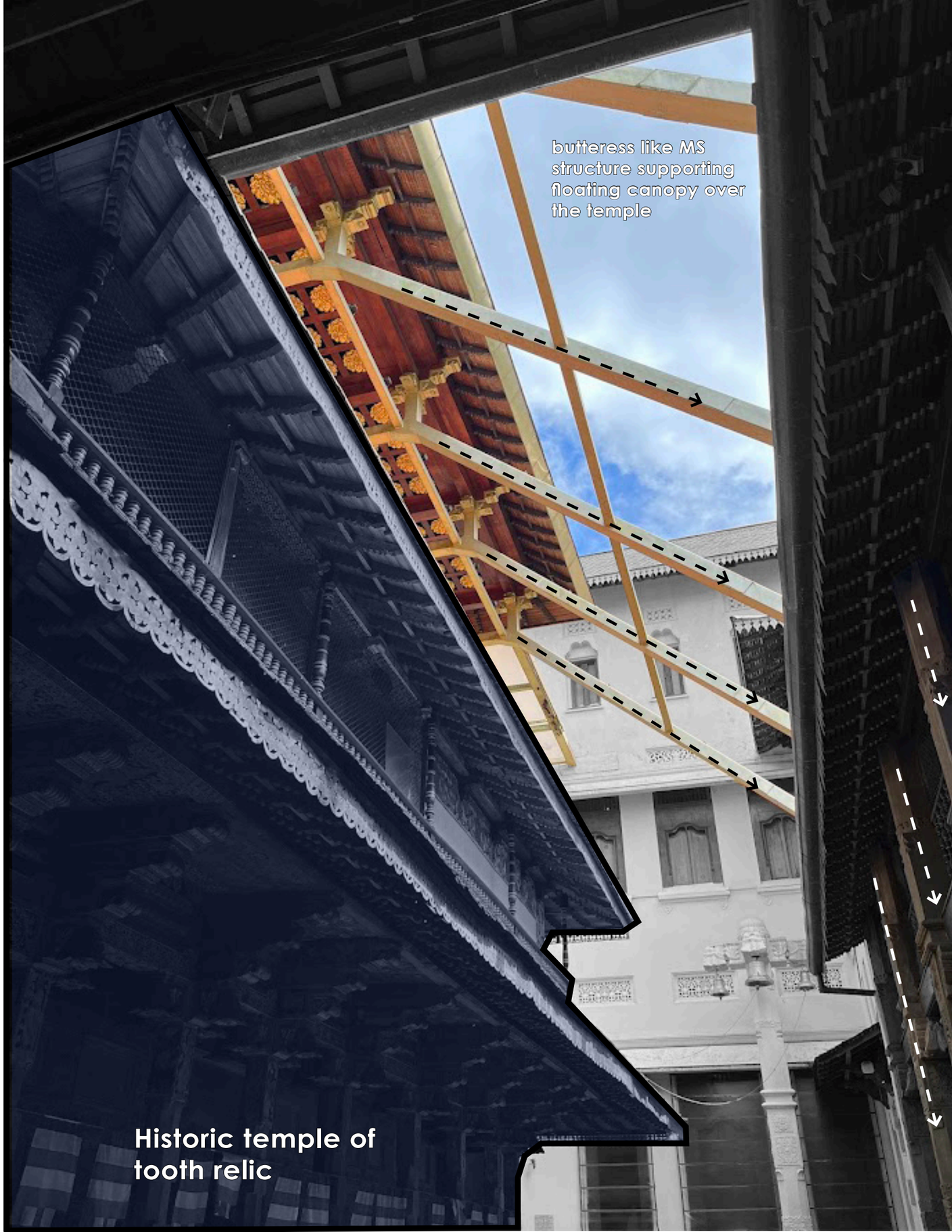
The nature of this responsibility shifts across contexts, moving from ritualised and collective forms of care in precolonial and sacred sites to institutional and often invisible labour in modern buildings. What remains consistent is the expectation that architecture endures through those who maintain it, positioning custodianship as central to how these places continue to exist.



Visibility of repair

Repair is made visible and, more importantly, accepted. In many religious and sacred sites, interventions are not hidden or disguised. Golden supports are added to prevent old trees from drooping, openly acknowledging fragility rather than concealing it reminds me of kintsugi. Similarly, at the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy, a separate protective roof is introduced to shield the shrine without transferring additional load onto the existing structure. This intervention is unappologetic and contemporary, yet careful in how it relates to the older fabric.

These acts of repair do not appear to diminish the value or authenticity of the site. Instead, they seem to affirm it. Repair is treated as a necessary continuation of care rather than a disruption. The visibility of these additions makes age, vulnerability, and responsibility legible within the architecture itself.

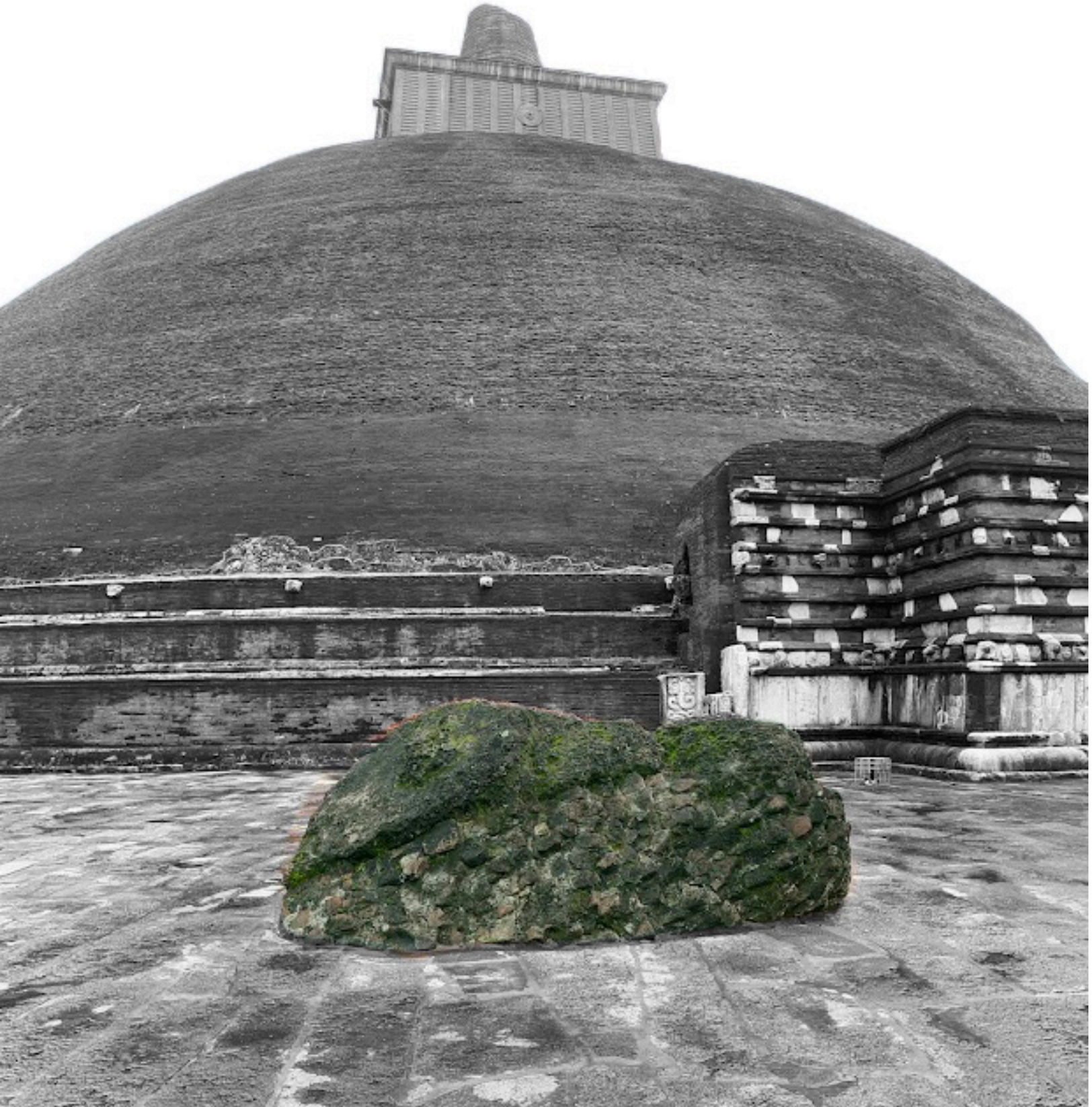

butteress like MS structure supporting floating canopy over the temple
Historic temple of tooth relic

Application of new brickwork at archaeological sites, where interventions range from micro-repairs that will eventually become indistinguishable from the existing fabric (first two images) to deliberately articulated additions that reinterpret earlier stone carvings (third image).

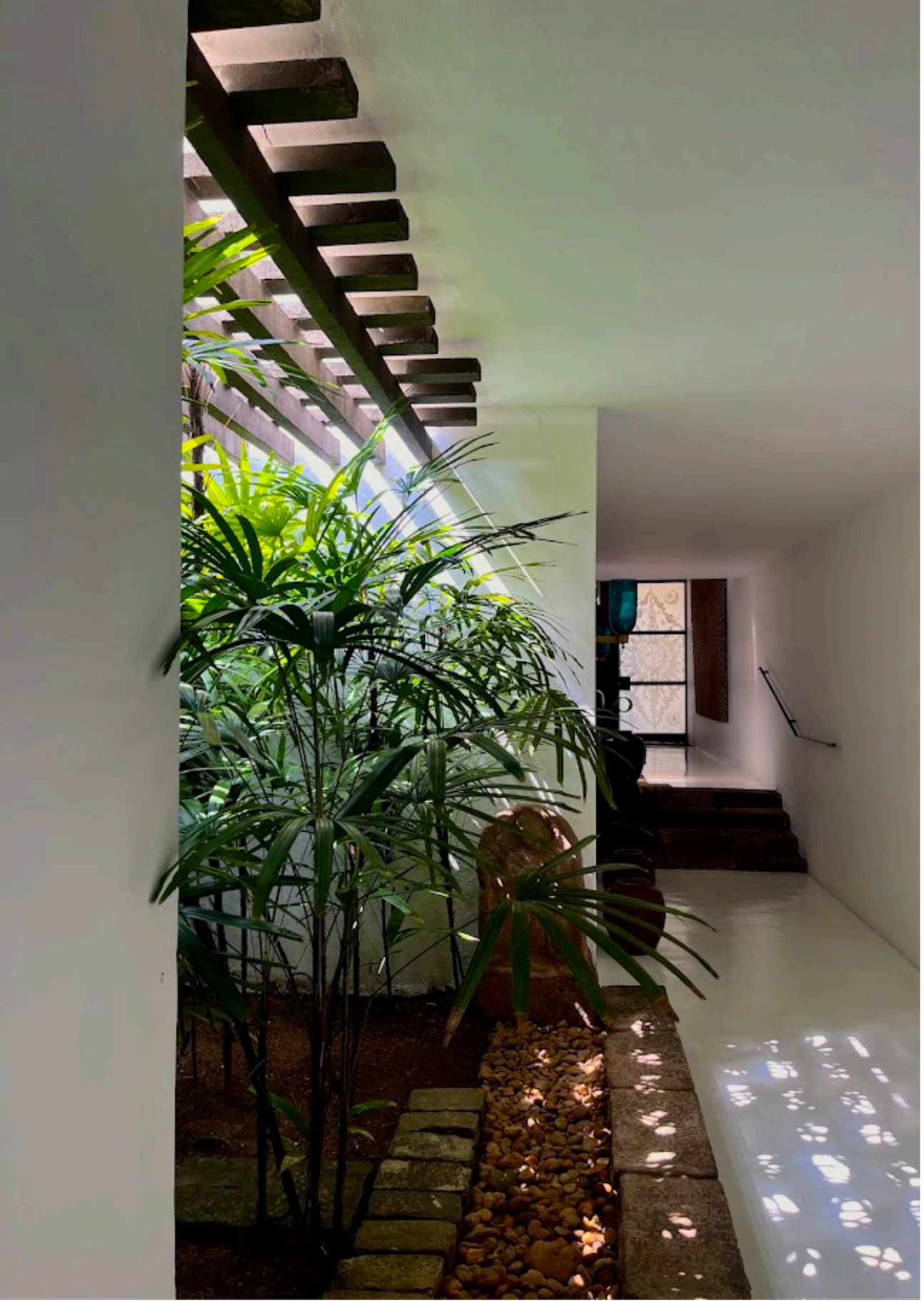
Rethinking Material Truth and Authenticity

Authenticity is not anchored in material purity or the preservation of untouched surfaces. It is sustained through ongoing engagement, where repair and intervention are understood as necessary conditions of continuity. What becomes evident is a wide range of approaches, at one end, interventions are unapologetically different from the existing fabric, openly declaring the time of their making; at the other end, repairs operate at a micro scale, gradually blending in until distinctions between old and new become indistinguishable.

Although these approaches appear opposed, they coexist without tension within these sites. Both are accepted as legitimate expressions of care, and neither is treated as a threat to historical meaning. Rather than fixing architecture at a single moment in time, this spectrum of interventions allows buildings to remain alive, continuously shaped by use, maintenance, and responsibility. In doing so, it challenges conservation frameworks that privilege a single idea of authenticity.



Design and conservation here are driven by the curation of narrative rather than rigid guidelines, allowing interventions to range from openly distinct to almost invisible, with both understood as legitimate expressions of care and continuity.



Tropical Modernism and the Reorganisation of Care

This logic of care continues into tropical modern architecture, though in a reorganised form. Buildings and floors are repeatedly repainted, surfaces refreshed, and landscapes carefully maintained. These actions suggest that upkeep is not incidental but anticipated by design. Architecture here seems to assume a future in which care will continue.

At the same time, there is a clear disjunction. Unlike the ritualised and visible maintenance of precolonial and religious sites, care in modern buildings is often institutional, outsourced, and largely invisible. While the act persists, the relationship between architecture and those who maintain it becomes more distant.

Discreet service corridors at Kandalama represent a deliberate architectural gesture to conceal the constant labour required to keep the building operational.

Interiors at House 11 are periodically repainted to maintain their deliberately pristine white appearance.

Holding Continuity and Disjunction Together

Care operates as a continuous thread across Sri Lanka's architectural landscapes, and is often presumed at the moment of design rather than treated as a later obligation. Built spaces endure not by resisting change, but through maintenance, repair, and adaptation that allow them to remain functional and meaningful over time. Care, in this sense, is both embedded in architectural decisions and enacted through everyday practices, including material choices that balance durability, appearance, and expectations of upkeep rather than strict ideas of material honesty.

This continuity is uneven. While acts of care persist across periods, their organisation and visibility shift. In sacred contexts, maintenance is often collective and ritualised, while in modern settings it becomes institutional, delegated, and increasingly invisible. The practice continues, but responsibility, labour, and agency are reorganised.

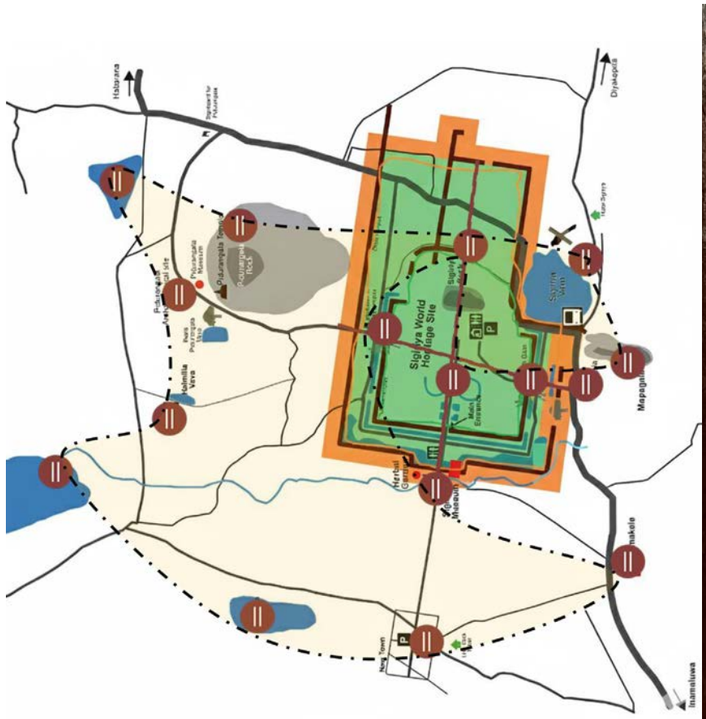
Rather than resolving these tensions, this narrative holds them open. Care persists, but its meanings and conditions change. It is within this overlap of continuity and disjunction that these places continue to be lived with, adapted, and sustained over time.

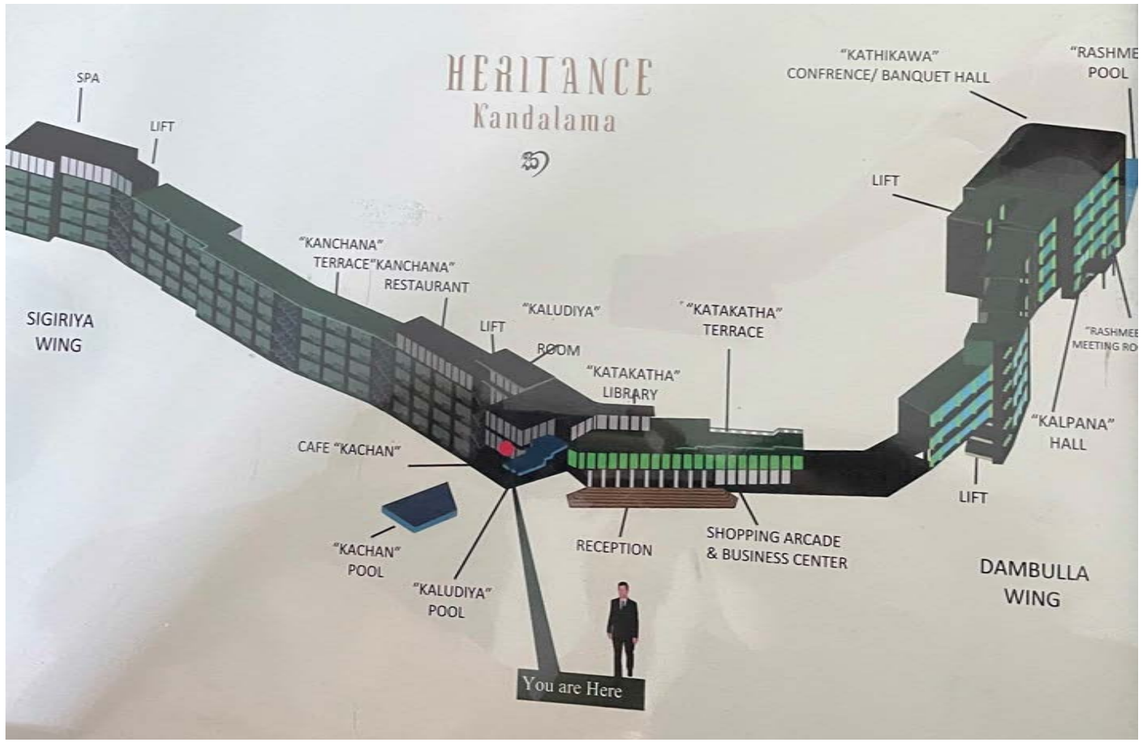
Movement as Meaning

Vishnu narayanan thampy | PUD24472

While walking in the Lunuganga estate, I was reminded of Anuradhapura and Sigiriya not by dint of form, but of intention. Lunuganga is in many ways a highly personal response to these ancient notions of space. While Anuradhapura presents as a horizontal spread of social belief, and Sigiriya presents a vertical experience of power and meditation, Lunuganga exists in the middle ground. It is a intimate landscape designed specifically for an individual, where walking is ritualistic and pause is deliberate. By way of subtle changes in ground levels, carefully framed perspectives, and paths that dissolve into infinity, the activity of walking in Lunuganga becomes a meditation. Together, these landscapes reveal movement as a shared spatial language across sacred, royal, and personal realms. The journey matters more than arrival, echoing older ideas of space as lived philosophy.

02b


Sigiriya World Heritage Site
Sigiriya Museum
Pidurangala Rock
Pidurangala Temple
Pidurangala Museum
Pidurangala Lake
Pidurangala Visitor Centre
Pidurangala Monastery
Sigiriya Village
Sigiriya Lake
Sigiriya Main Entrance
Sigiriya Car Park
Sigiriya Bus Stop
Sigiriya Tourist Information Centre
Sigiriya Main Entrance
Sigiriya Museum
Sigiriya Lake
Sigiriya Village

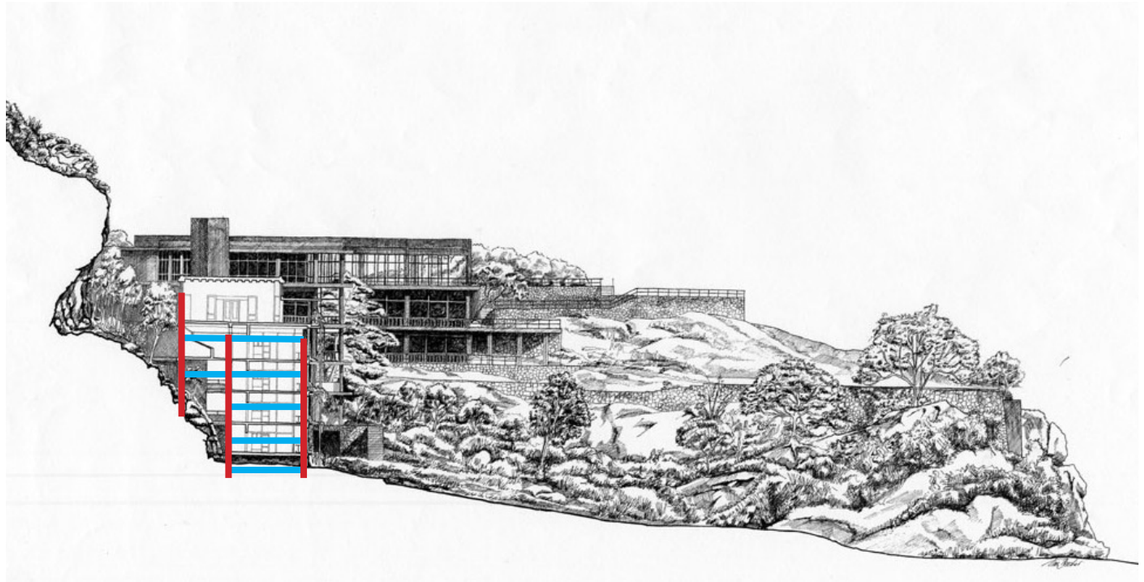


Built with Nature

Cyriac Jose | PSD24500

Across Sri Lanka provided an opportunity to critically evaluate how conventional structural systems can be adapted and optimized through architectural intent, site constraints, and environmental integration. Although the majority of buildings observed employ familiar reinforced concrete frame systems, their structural logic, load transfer mechanisms, and foundation strategies reveal a higher level of engineering refinement when viewed in relation to context.

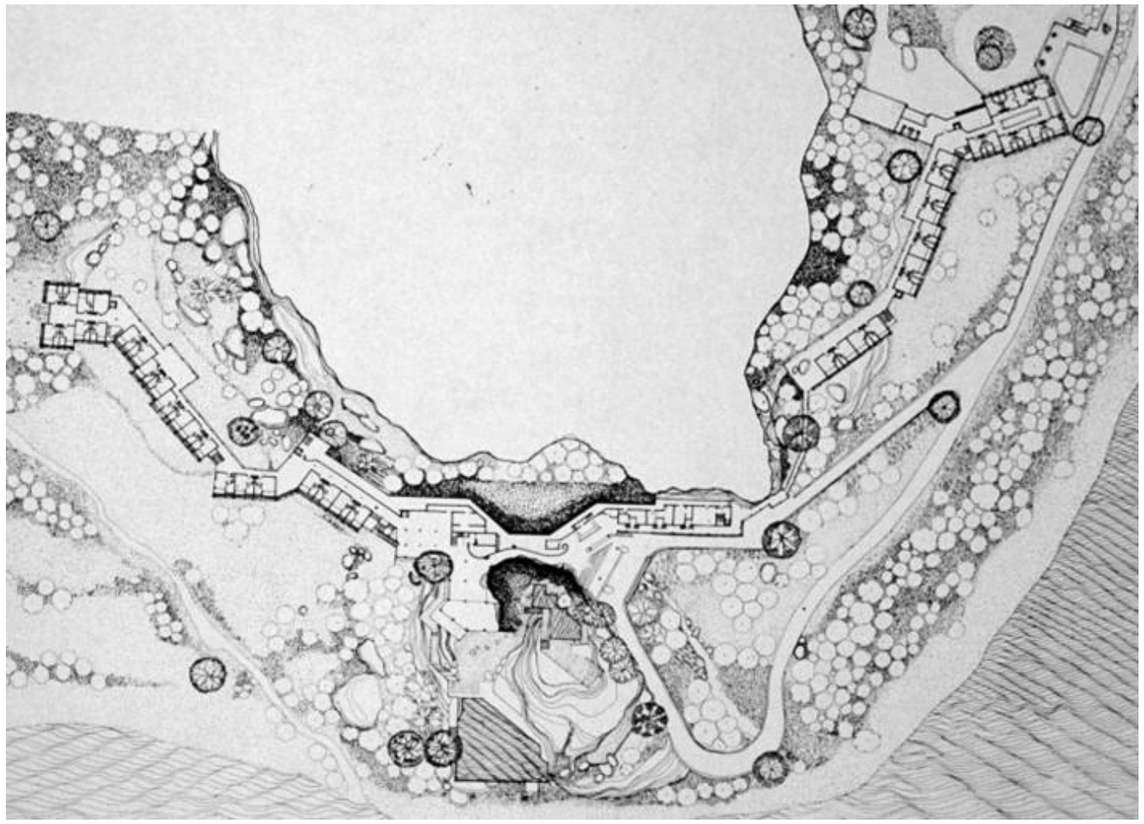
02c



- Conventional beam–column frame system.
- Moment-resisting connections at joints.
- Direct and efficient load transfer mechanism.

Beam

Column



- The structural grid is adjusted to avoid cutting or blasting of rock formations
- Minimal excavation and earthwork ensure that the natural soil and rock strata remain largely undisturbed

At the Sri Lankan Parliament complex, the primary structural system consists of a reinforced concrete beam–column frame with slab action providing diaphragm behavior. The plan symmetry and elevation balance play a crucial role in ensuring uniform load distribution and minimizing torsional irregularities under gravity and lateral loading. This symmetrical configuration also serves as a visual indicator for differential settlement, as any deviation in column support behavior would become immediately perceptible in the façade geometry. The roof system, largely executed in timber, functions as a lightweight structural assembly, reducing seismic mass while efficiently transferring loads to the primary RC frame. The use of timber also improves structural efficiency by lowering dead load and foundation demand.

At Heritance Kandalama, the structural strategy is governed primarily by topographical and geological constraints. The building is supported on a system of isolated reinforced concrete footings founded directly on competent rock and stiff soil strata. This foundation approach allows individual columns to transfer axial loads safely while minimizing excavation and disturbance to the existing terrain. The superstructure consists of a reinforced concrete frame aligned linearly along the cliff face, resulting in significant cantilever actions at balconies and corridor slabs. These cantilever elements require careful control of deflection, negative bending moments, and shear forces at fixed supports.

The column grid is intentionally irregular and selectively positioned to avoid cutting into major rock formations, which introduces non-uniform load paths and necessitates detailed structural analysis for load redistribution and footing design under eccentric and inclined loading conditions. Lateral stability is achieved through a combination of moment-resisting frames and strategically placed shear walls integrated within stair and service cores.

Due to the elongated geometry of the building, special attention must be given to temperature effects, creep, shrinkage, and differential settlement between isolated footings, requiring the introduction of expansion joints and structural segmentation. Overall, the project demonstrates how conventional RC frame construction with isolated foundations can be intelligently adapted to complex terrain, proving that structural engineering can simultaneously satisfy safety, serviceability, constructability, and architectural intent.

03

BETWEEN SENSORIAL MOMENTS

Group 3
Aarya, Tanvi, Paarthvi, Shivagugan

This journey through Sri Lanka allowed me to read architecture as a continuous spatial conversation across time rather than as separate historical moments. There were four places that we visited that felt like moments of continuity within this journey, where spatial ideas transcended time. Experiencing Anuradhapura, House No. 11 Lunuganga, and Kandalama in succession revealed how ideas of movement, climate responsiveness, and humane spatial experience persist and transform from the premodern to the contemporary. I began to recognize not stylistic similarities, but shared ways of sensing the space as an individual.

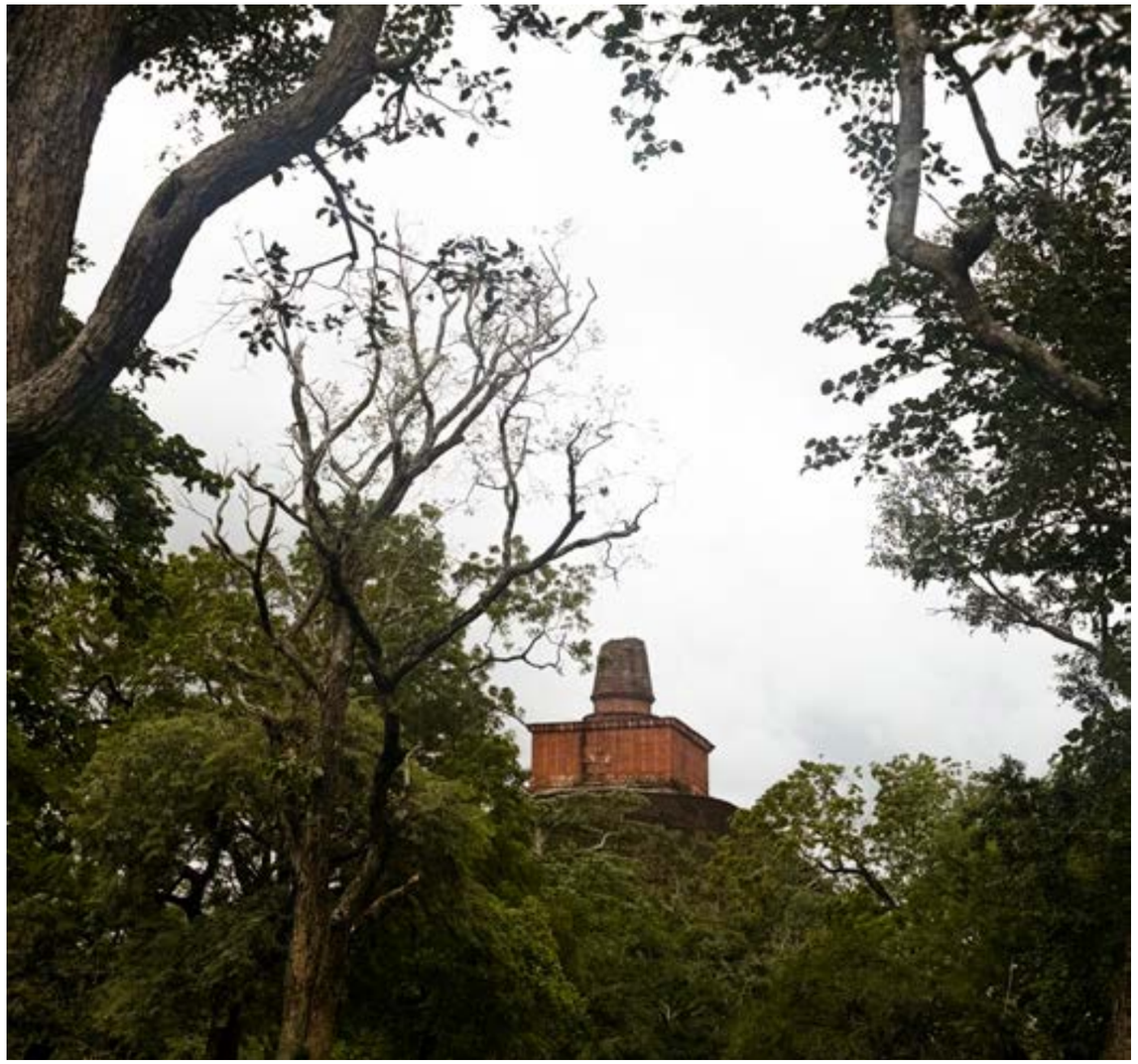
From the ritual landscapes of Anuradhapura, to the intimate choreography of Lunuganga, sequential unfolding of House No. 11 and the immersive environmental integration of Kandalama, architecture consistently unfolds through movement, sensory engagement, and climatic negotiation. This realization shifted my understanding of architecture from designing objects to shaping experiences that are lived, remembered, and deeply connected to place.

A Sensorial Continuum

Shivagugan Selvarasu

Observing through the built presences across Sri Lanka, one comes to a realisation that the architecture isn't just experienced as a set of buildings from separate time periods but an ongoing conversation between land, climate, and the human body. As we move across time, the meaning emerges less from how they appear and more from how space unfolds through movement, pause, and sensory engagement. Across time, whether in sacred landscapes, domestic gardens, or contemporary structures embedded in terrain, the continuity based on how architecture shapes the human body's sensorial experience according to the climate and landscape is evident.

03a



ANURADHAPURA

As one traverses across the ruins of Anuradhapura, their senses are fully exposed to the outside environment. One is exposed completely to the open sky, guided by the monolithic structures that emerge from the ground, rising naturally from the landscape ,seeming to merge with it. These large, forms give rhythm , direction and occasional relief through shade and water. As one walks along these paths, the heat from the Sun, the vast scale of the surroundings and the silence of the landscape slowly gets registered into our body, shaping not only our movement but our awareness in a subconscious level. Here, the built environment connects an individual to nature not by enclosing them but by guiding them across expansive open spaces.

Built form grows from the earth against the open sky,dissolving the boundry between landscape and monument.

Spaces unfold as continuous movements led by repetition and allignment, pulling the body forward

water mediates between climate and scale, cooling the body and slowing movement within the open landscape

light is gently controlled and filtered through foliages and openings, softening the space and enhancing comfort

the landscape leads to places of pause and stillness,offering relief from movement and exposure

water quietly accompanies movement, proving calmness through reflection and sound

QR TO SENSORIAL VIDEO

To maximize this narrative's impact, the audience should engage in a "front and back" dialogue between book and video to reconcile theory with sensation. The text serves as an anatomical map, providing the philosophical framework to categorize space. Transitioning to video backs these abstractions—turning "thermal shock" into a blinding visual reality and "unfiltered breath" into an immersive soundscape. Returning to the text, the reader possesses a recalibrated perspective, no longer reading descriptions but "remembering" physical sensations. This cyclical process transforms a static history into a multi-sensory immersion where the book provides the "why" and the video provides the "now."

From Anchor to Filter: A Genealogy of the Sensorial Event in Sri Lankan Space

UAR23152 | Paarthivi Shetty

The Sri Lankan architectural journey is an evolution in the sophisticated management of the "void," transitioning from the construction of static objects to the curation of sensorial "events." This trajectory charts a path from the Sacred Void of antiquity to the Domestic Void of modernism, culminating in the Ecological Void of the contemporary era—a narrative of the built environment gradually yielding to the landscape.

03b

In the ancient ruins of Anuradhapura, this begins with the Event of the Anchor. The Great Stupas function as man-made mountains, claiming the horizon with geometric defiance. The architectural potency here lies in "thermal shock"—a visceral friction between the "Blinding Above" of the sun-drenched courtyards and the "Cool Below" of the stone shadows. The structure acts as a dense, spiritual anchor, using its immense thermal mass to create a sanctuary of silence against the vast, flat plains.

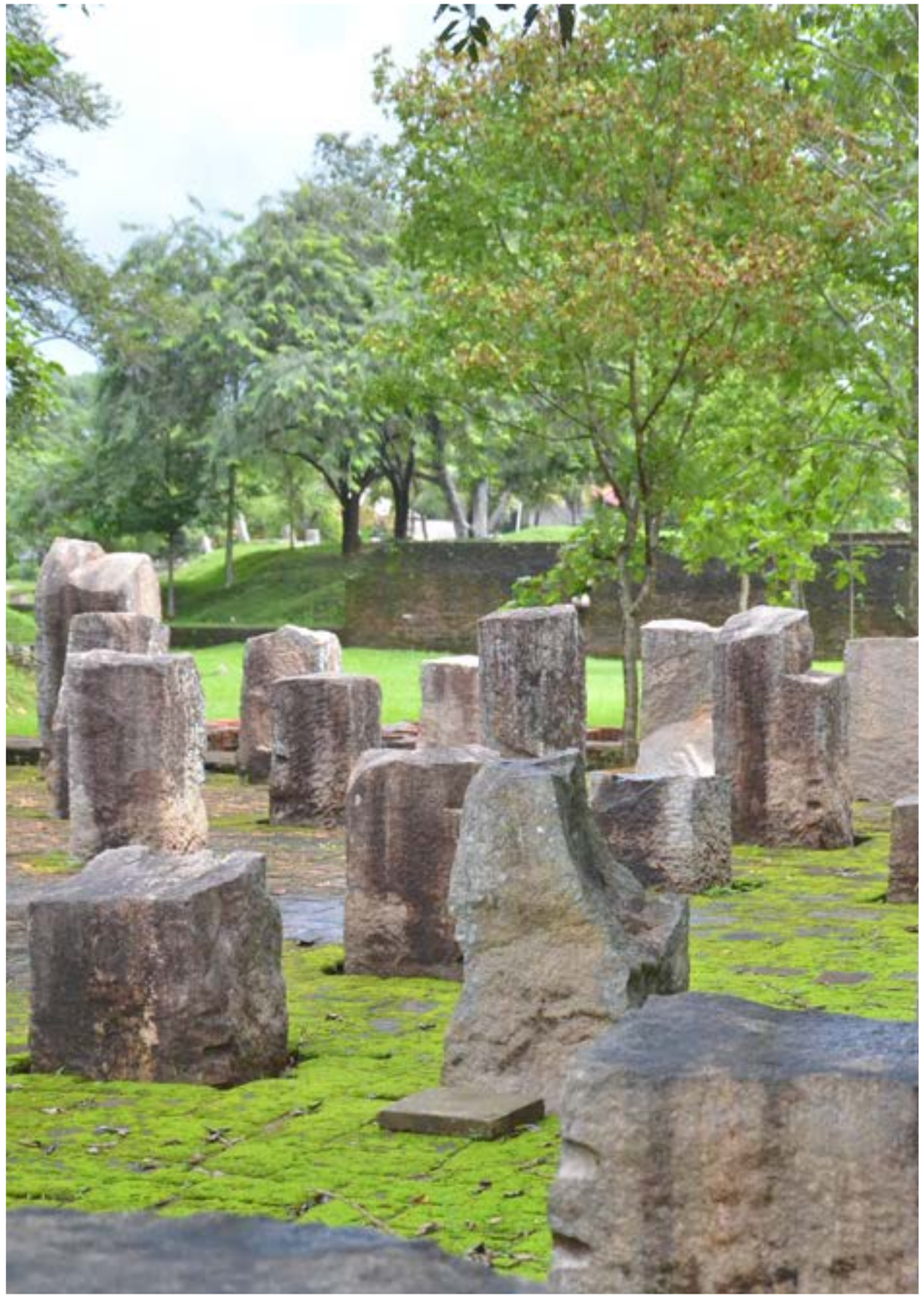
These weathered monoliths represent the structural persistence of the ancient city, grounding the landscape with an unyielding, geometric defiance.

The verticality of the palm trees mimics the stupa's ascent, both reaching toward the sun-drenched courtyards of the sky.

These weathered monoliths represent the structural persistence of the ancient city, grounding the landscape with an unyielding, geometric defiance.

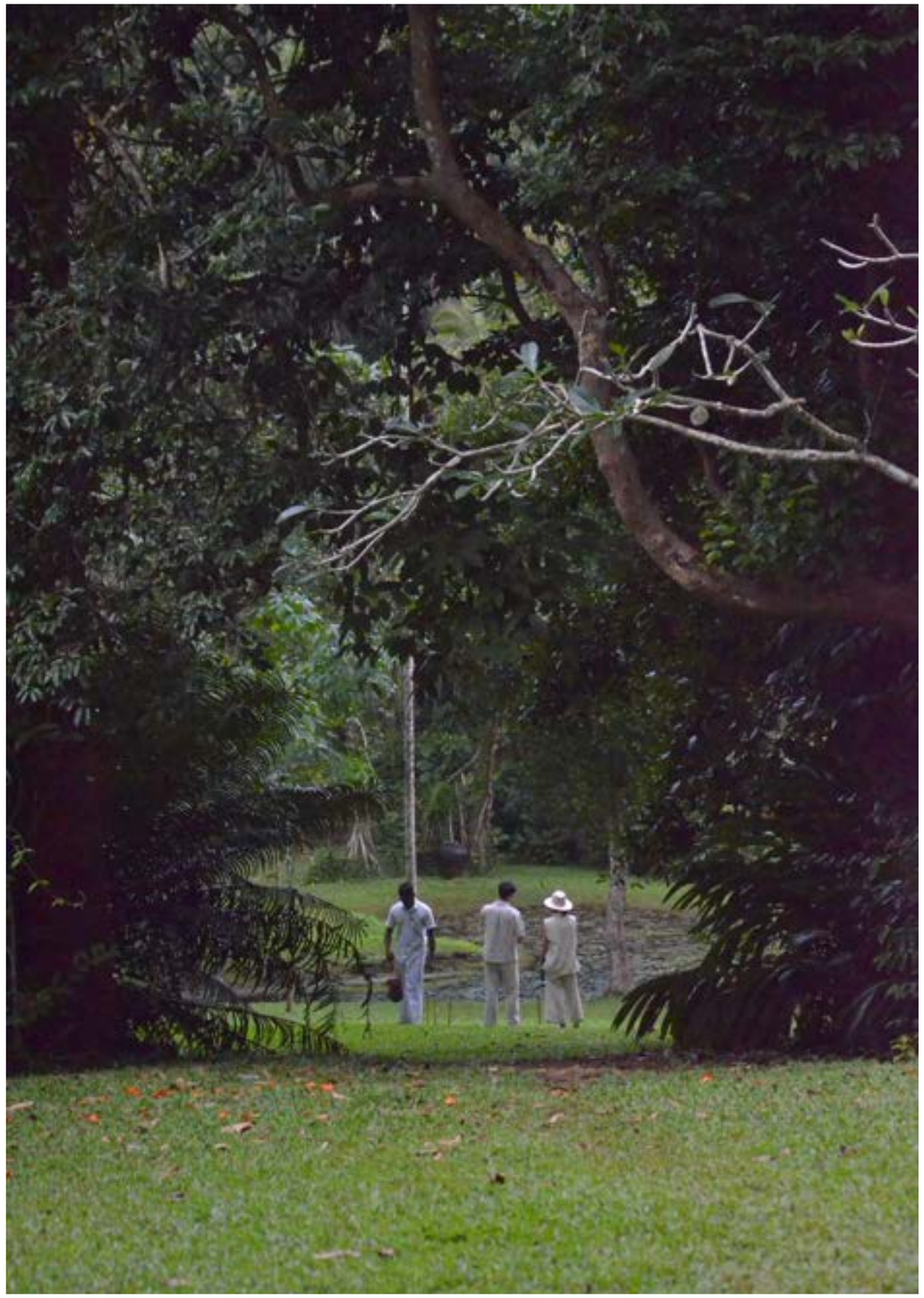
The silhouette of the stupa acts as a spiritual anchor, its dark, weathered surface absorbing the sun's intensity to preserve the silence within.

A stone vessel rests by the water's edge, a silent witness to the "Cool Below," where stone and shadow meet the literal cooling properties of the ancient reservoirs.



A field of stone pillars stands as a skeletal remains of the "Event of the Anchor," marking where spiritual foundations were first driven into the earth.

With Modernism and Geoffrey Bawa's Lunuganga, the narrative shifts to the Event of the Filter. The architectural shout becomes a whisper, a series of choreographed "pauses." Here, the building acts as a lens, mediating the pressure between the interior and the wild. Through the "Framed Gaze" of verandahs and doorways, the jungle is distilled into a composed painting. It is a state of Controlled Intimacy, where the architecture exists solely to calibrate the sensory dialogue between the inhabitant and the garden. Finally, at Heritance Kandalama, the journey reaches the Event of Disappearance. The architectural ego vanishes, transforming the structure into a "living screen" or a giant trellis.

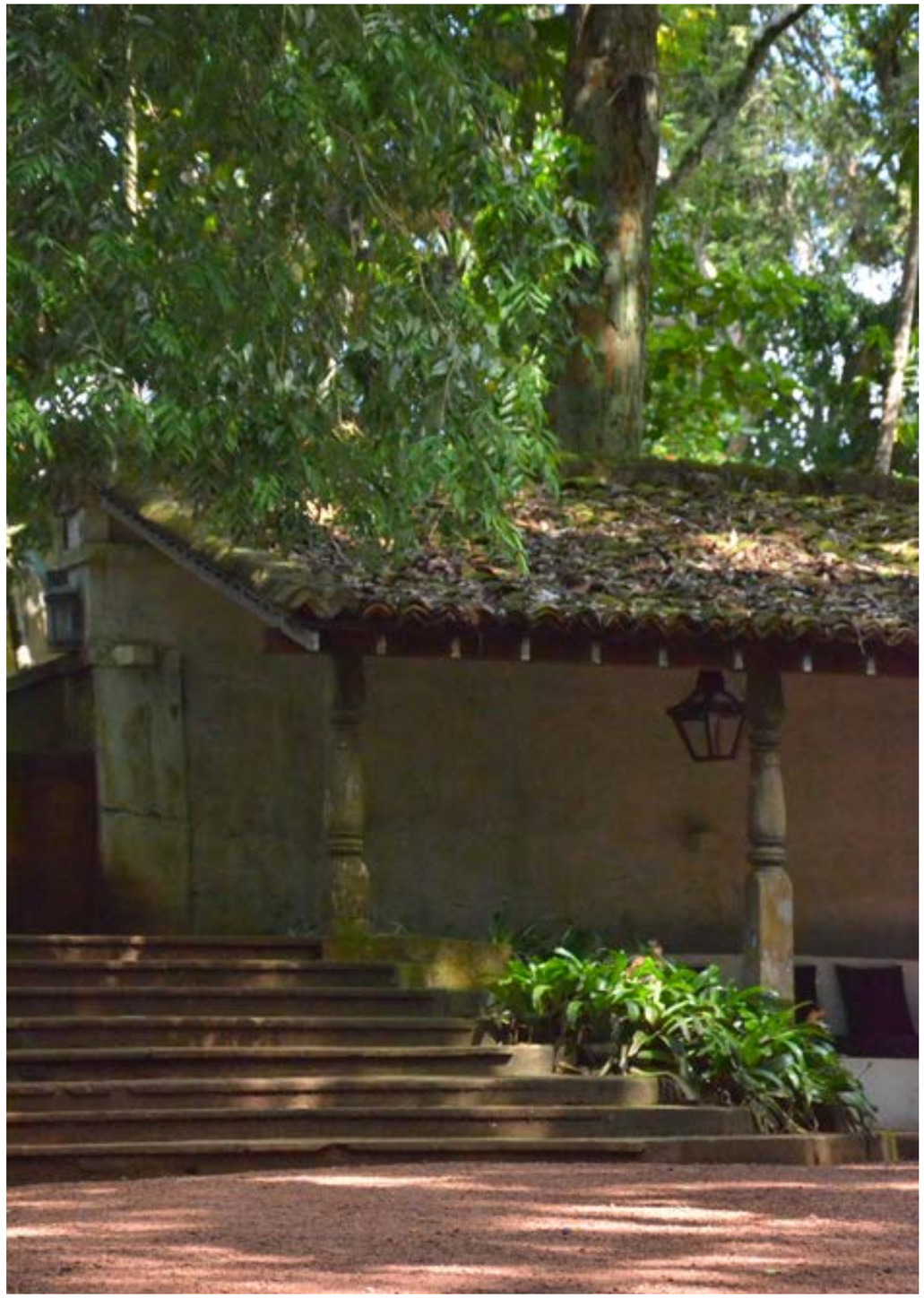


By framing the horizon and the garden, the wild is no longer an external force but a curated experience—a moment of "Controlled Intimacy" where the building exists solely to facilitate the dialogue with nature.

Receding frames within the house deepen the sense of transition. Each doorway is a layer of mediation, moving the inhabitant through a series of sensorial "events" before they reach the garden.

Captured sunlight filters through leaves and timber screens, creating a "charged" interior. The architecture doesn't just block the light; it uses it to articulate the stillness of the interior space

The house at Lunuganga does not compete with the garden; it filters it. It is a lens through which the chaos of the jungle is softened into a series of serene, architectural pauses.

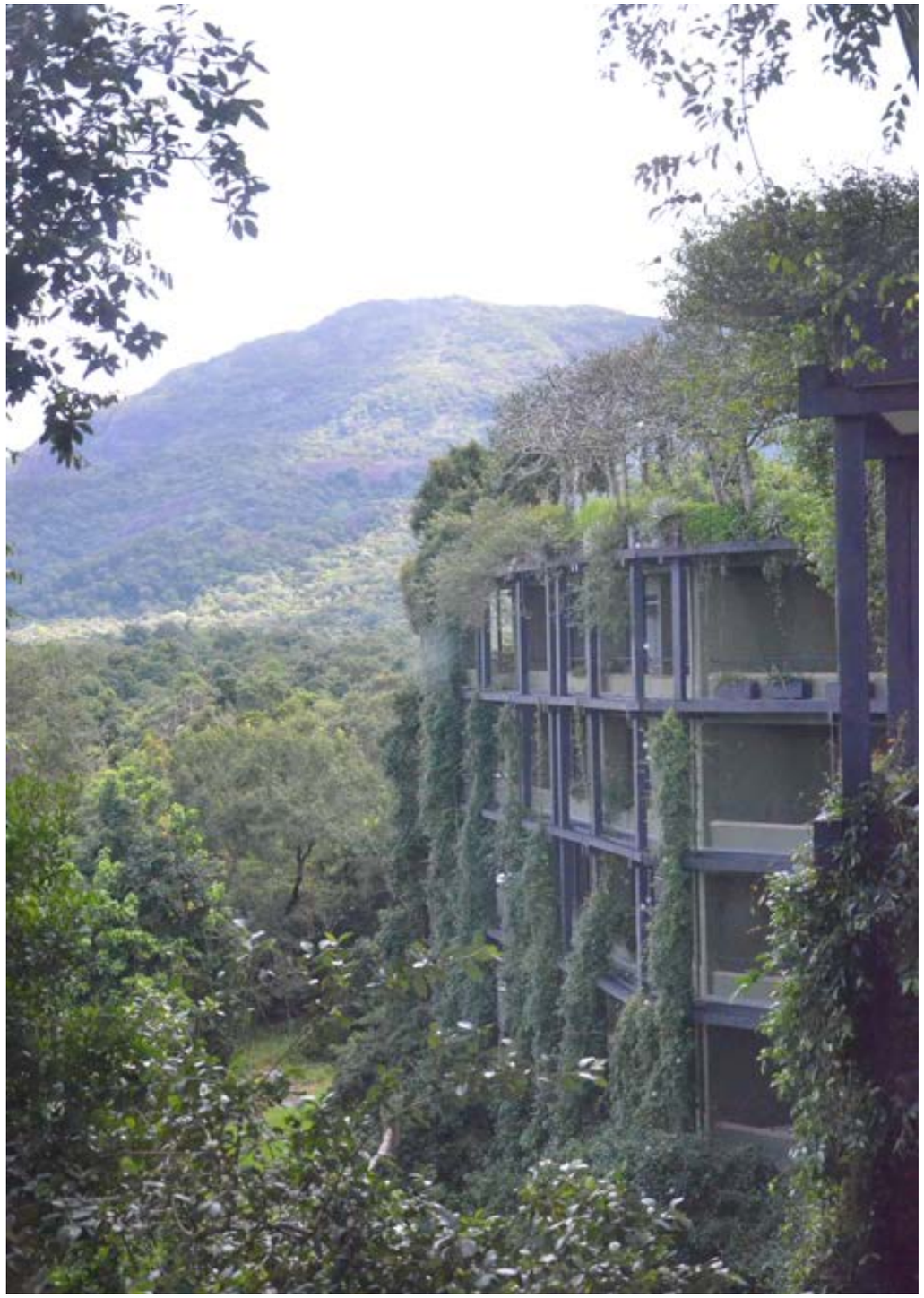


Bawa's transition from a shout to a whisper. This doorway serves as a threshold where the interior pressure meets the jungle, distilling the landscape into a composed, living painting.

Here, the structure retreats to allow the "Event of the Filter" to take center stage. Through this framed gaze, the architecture acts as a sensory lens, calibrating a state of controlled intimacy between the inhabitant and the encroaching wild.

The Sri Lankan architectural journey is an evolution in the sophisticated management of the "void," transitioning from the construction of static objects to the curation of sensorial "events." This trajectory charts a path from the Sacred Void of antiquity to the Domestic Void of modernism, culminating in the Ecological Void of the contemporary era—a narrative of the built environment gradually yielding to the landscape.

The sensory climax is the Unfiltered Breath, where the lake's humidity and the cliff's rugged protrusion are invited directly into the corridors. In this radical surrender, the tension between the "built" and the "grown" is resolved through total integration, marking the final erasure of the boundary between human artifice and the natural world.

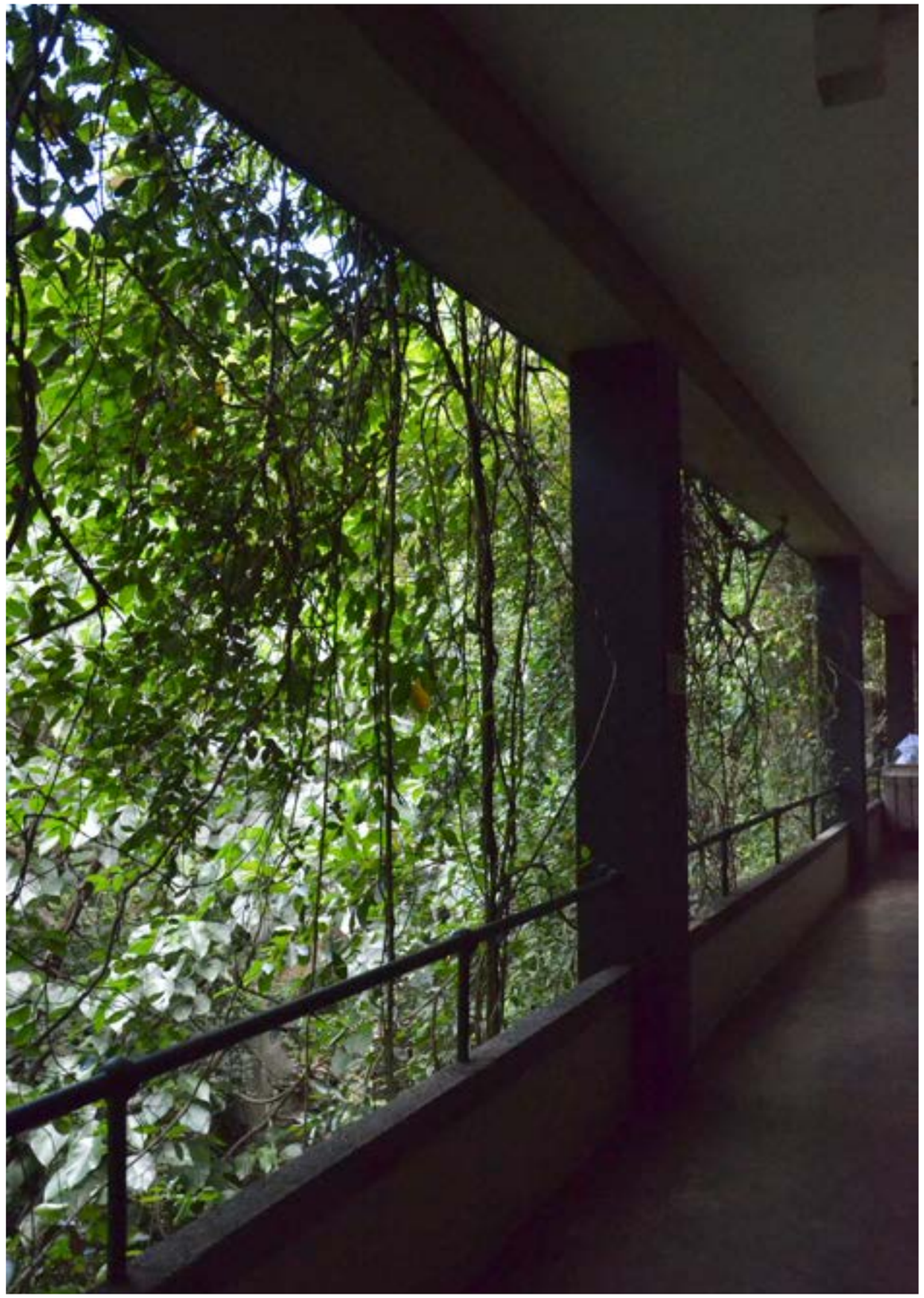


The structure is no longer a building, but a massive trellis that resolves the tension between the "built" and the "grown" against the mountain's edge.

Marking a radical surrender, the cliff itself is invited directly into the interior, making the mountain an inhabitant of the lobby.

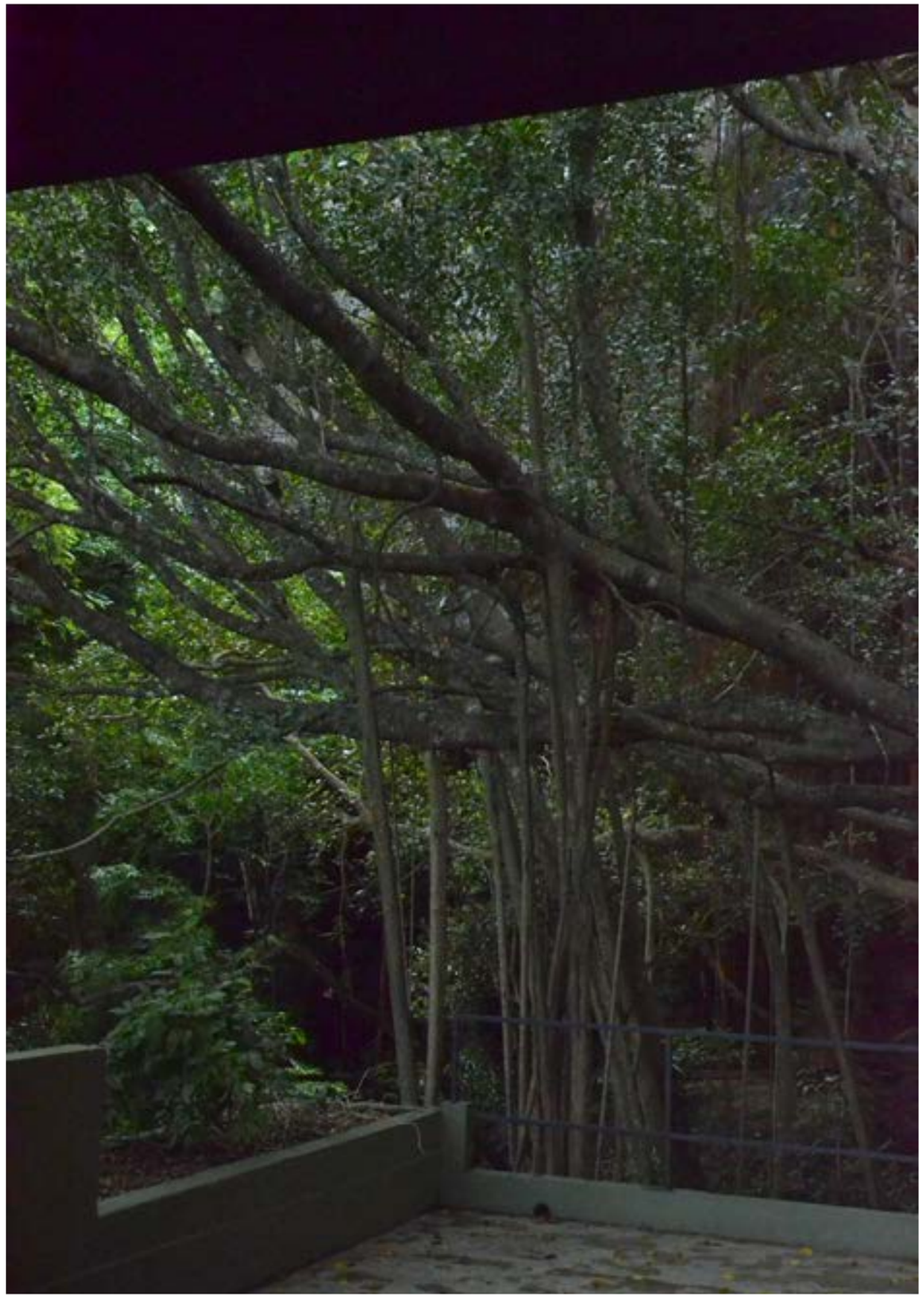
Architecture transformed into a repetitive shadow, allowing the sensory climax of the forest to bleed through its open frame.

A total integration where the human corridor dissolves into a banyan grove, finalising the erasure of the boundary between artifice and the natural world.



A radical integration where the boundary between human artifice and the natural world is finally, and beautifully, lost.

A vast, empty stage for nature, where the structure is no longer a shelter, but a panoramic witness.

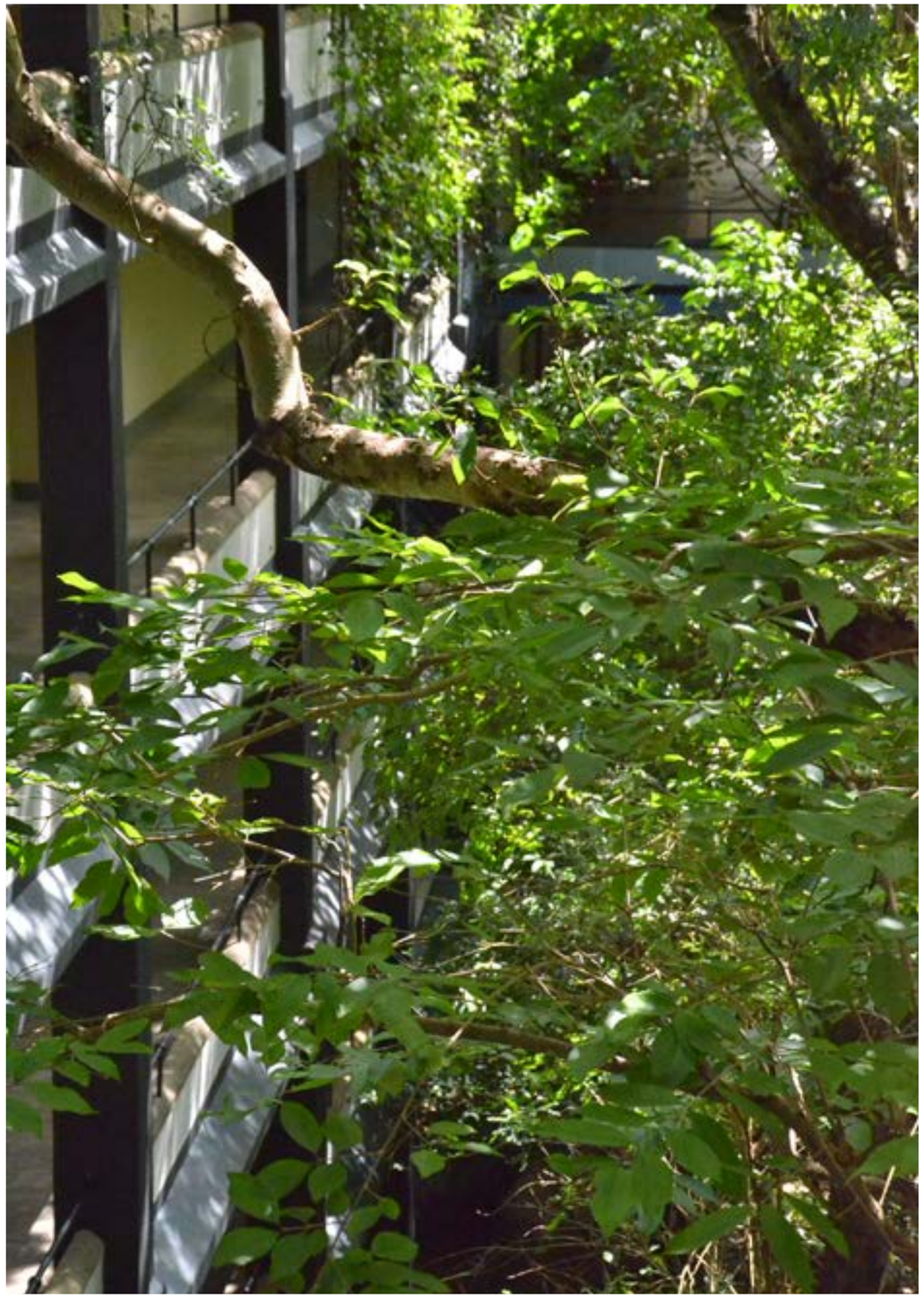


Where the cliff's ancient life force is invited into the corridors, erasing the memory of the human

Radical surrender as the "grown" replaces the "built," turning a corridor into a shaded forest path

A threshold poised for surrender, inviting the lake's humidity and the light of the wild directly into the interior.

Wildlife traversing the "living screen," where human artifice becomes a mere extension of their habitat



Architecture acting as a silent framework, allowing the forest to reclaim the vertical space.

A giant trellis where the “built” begins its slow dissolve into the rugged cliffside.

Experiencing spaces through Nature & Senses

Aarya Tammewar

My understanding of Sri Lankan architecture emerged through lived, sensory experience rather than an awareness of design intent. Across Sigiriya, House No. 11, Lunuganga, and Heritance Kandalama, space was perceived through sight, sound, touch, and smell, shaped by how architecture mediated the relationship between indoor and outdoor environments. At each site, nature was not treated as a backdrop but as an active presence that entered, framed, or enveloped architectural space. Boundaries between inside and outside often softened, allowing light, air, water, vegetation, and terrain to influence movement and perception. The degree of openness or enclosure varied, creating moments of exposure, transition, and immersion that guided how one moved, paused, and engaged with space. Rather than recalling buildings as isolated objects, these places are remembered through sensory impressions formed by their dialogue with the landscape. This continuous interaction between architecture and nature made experience central to understanding form, space, and atmosphere.

03c

Sigiriya

Standing at the top of Sigiriya, the experience felt overwhelming and powerful, shaped by height, exposure, and stillness. The long ascent heightened bodily awareness, making the act of reaching the summit feel earned rather than immediate. From above, the surrounding landscape appeared vast and distant, creating a sense of dominance while also revealing one's own smallness within it. Movement slowed instinctively, and moments of pause felt intentional, as if the space demanded attention and restraint. There was a constant awareness of openness, where nothing shielded the body from sun, wind, or view. Rather than feeling enclosed by architecture, the experience was defined by elevation and presence within the landscape itself, setting the stage for how the senses engaged with the space.

Within the empty rock caves, I experienced a brief sense of enclosure and stillness. This pause heightened my awareness of the mass above and the exposure that followed.

Moving along the central axis, my movement felt directed and intentional, drawn toward the rock as a dominant anchor. The symmetry of the water bodies imposed order within the rugged landscape.

The ascend involved being close to the rock, taking its support engaging with the rock at close range, its rough and weathered surface made time and permanence physically perceptible. Touch became a primary way of understanding the site beyond visual form.

From above, the landscape appeared vast and continuous, producing a strong sense of spatial dominance. Reduced sound and movement intensified my awareness of height and exposure.

Looking down from the summit, I became acutely conscious of my position and vulnerability. The effort of ascent remained present, influencing how carefully I moved and paused.

Lunuganga

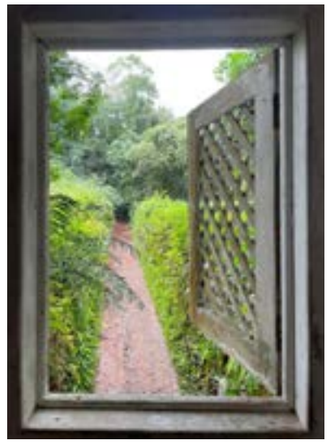
Moving through Lunuganga, my experience was shaped by continuous movement and a sequence of changing views. As I walked, the landscape revealed itself gradually, with outdoor spaces unfolding like a series of connected rooms rather than a single open garden. My perception shifted with each transition, making movement and progression central to how the space was understood.

My experience of Lunuganga was strongly shaped by touch, not only through furniture but through the ground itself. I became aware of changing textures underfoot, shifting from soft tiles to rugged concrete and then into gravel, with grass gradually merging into these surfaces. Recycled wooden furniture and carved stone elements, such as the dining table, added tactile depth and character. Moss deliberately grown over rocks softened their surface and appearance, making them feel gentler to touch and visually integrated into the landscape.

The smell at Lunuganga was entirely shaped by the outdoors. The presence of soil, grass, water, and vegetation created a constant natural scent that reinforced the openness of the space. This smell remained consistent throughout, grounding the experience in nature rather than architecture.

Sound was subtle yet immersive, shaped by natural elements across the site. Ripples in the lake and rain falling onto the small ponds created soft, continuous soundscapes. I imagined the bells placed by Bawa adding another layer, their sound travelling across

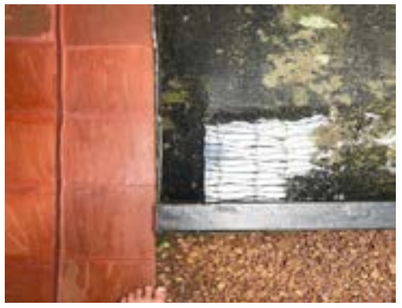
Visually, Lunuganga felt expansive and carefully composed. The vast green countryside and shifting elevations made the landscape feel palace-like rather than small house. Entering through the gates felt secretive and ethereal, as if stepping into a carefully curated world shaped more by landscape than built form.



Number 11

At House No. 11, the space felt like a home rather than a designed object. Moving through it, I experienced a sense of comfort and familiarity created by tight rooms, low thresholds, and layered interiors. Nature was invited into the house gently and deliberately through light, plants, water, and small courtyards, never imposed or overwhelming. It felt posh, almost like a rich man's villa, carefully designed with every nuance and setting meant to serve Bawa. Yet, the use of recycled wood and the way nature was woven into the space softened that sense of pride. It didn't feel flashy or stereotypical; instead, it felt grounded and thoughtful.

House No. 11 felt small, compact, and comfortable, reinforcing the sense of being inside a home rather than a large architectural space. My body responded to the variety of textures, from soft carpets to terracotta clay tiles underfoot. Gravel in small courtyards and the presence of water-catching stones added tactile moments that made movement through the house feel thoughtful and intimate.



The smell within the house felt natural and familiar, shaped by plants, soil, and air entering through open ceilings and courtyards. These natural elements softened the interior environment, preventing the house from feeling sealed or artificial. The scent reinforced the idea of a lived-in space that blended indoor comfort with outdoor presence.

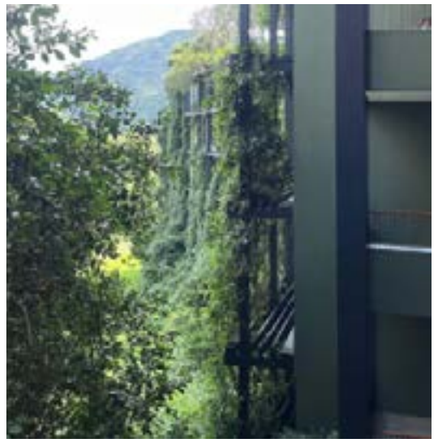
Sound played a quiet but constant role in shaping the experience. Water droplets falling one by one from the water-catching stones into small ponds created a gentle, rhythmic sound. This, combined with the muted acoustics of enclosed rooms, made the house feel calm and personal.

Visually, the house felt carefully composed yet deeply domestic. Open ceilings and small courtyards allowed trees, plants, and daylight to enter, filling voids with moments of light and shadow. Sunlight arriving in thin lines during sunrise animated the interiors, making nature an integral part of the indoor experience rather than something kept outside.

Heritance Kandalama

At Heritance Kandalama, the experience felt luxurious, but never flashy or ostentatious. The luxury came from how closely the hotel was framed around the rock itself, which quietly became the main presence in almost every space. Moving through corridors, rooms, and common areas, the rock was always there- sometimes beside you, sometimes beneath you, sometimes framed at a distance- making the landscape feel more important than the building, reminding me that the architecture was carefully built around what already existed rather than imposed over it. Air, light, and sound moved freely through the space, and materials felt raw and honest, sometimes cool, sometimes rough. Despite the scale of the hotel, it never felt overwhelming. Instead, it felt calm and grounding, as though the luxury came from being held by nature rather than separated from it.

The rock was never a background element; it remained constantly present across spaces. Whether seen beside circulation paths, beneath the swimming pool, or framed through openings, its proximity made the landscape feel more dominant than the building. This constant presence created a sense of grounding, reminding me that the architecture was shaped around what already existed rather than imposed over it.



The experience felt deeply connected to nature, where built boundaries dissolved into landscape. The hotel feel partially concealed within its surroundings. These moments felt raw and untamed, creating the sense of being immersed rather than protected from the environment.

Air, light, and weather moved freely through the spaces, becoming part of everyday experience. Open-to-sky areas such as the spa allowed rain to be captured in simple floor-level ponds, turning natural events into quiet moments of awareness. Shaded pathways formed by plants and creepers created a canopy-like condition, where movement felt sheltered yet open, reinforcing the constant overlap between architecture and nature.

VASTNESS, RITUAL & BODY IN LANDSCAPE

Tanvi Nerurkar | PUM25354

Anuradhapura: ancient sacred city of Sri Lanka

At **Anuradhapura**, architecture is experienced through vastness, rhythm, and ritual movement. Walking through the sacred city, I became aware of how space unfolds slowly, through long axial paths, open grounds, and moments of pause near water bodies and stupas. The scale is monumental, yet the experience feels deeply personal. With minimal enclosure, the body is exposed to light, heat, wind, and sound, making climate an active participant in spatial experience. Built form and void work together to situate the individual within a larger ecological and spiritual order. This experience taught me that architecture does not need density or walls to feel powerful; meaning emerges through alignment, repetition, and time spent moving through space.

03d

W25FA020- Climatic and Social Narratives of Place

"Space announces itself through distance rather than enclosure, drawing the body into a larger sacred order."

Entering the Sacred Landscape

01 Vastness

"Movement unfolds slowly, where repetition and alignment allow space to be understood over time."

Walking becomes a mode of reading landscape

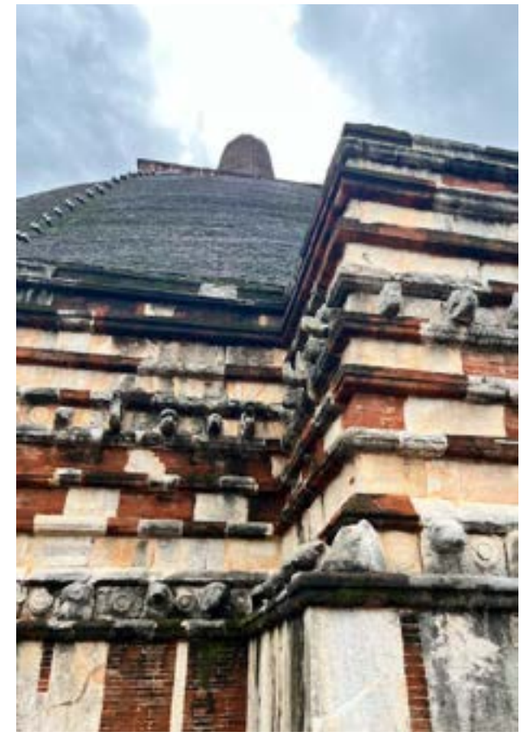
02 Procession

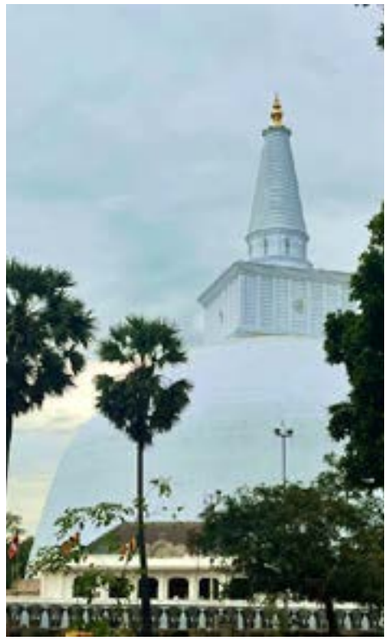
"There is a hush within vastness. Moments of pause anchors one within an expansive landscape."

Void holds as much meaning as built form

03 Stillness

"Meaning emerges not from enclosure, but from the dialogue between monumental mass and expansive void."





05 Timeless

"Anuradhapura reveals how alignment, rhythm, and time can create deeply humane spaces without density or enclosure. Light, heat, wind, and sound directly shape experience. The body remains exposed, making climate inseparable

A reflection of timeless order

What is built becomes
a whisper,
what is invisible
becomes vast—
Anuradhapura holds
time gently,
not as memory, but as
continuance.

04

COEXISTENCE, MOVEMENT, AND THRESHOLDS

Group 4
Sadiya Sharmin (PUP24309)
Rajvi Shah (PUP24290)
Nafela Naveed (UAR20099)
Daksh Patel (UAR23050)

Our study of architecture in Sri Lanka revealed a built environment defined not by replacement or rupture, but by co-existence. Across cities, landscapes, and buildings, what stands out is not a singular architectural identity but the ability of multiple identities to remain active at once. Sri Lankan architecture feels like a continuous negotiation — between past and present, land and construction, interior and exterior, culture and climate — where the answer is rarely one or the other, but both.

At the urban scale, co-existence is visible in the way traditional spatial logics and later colonial influences occupy the same ground without conflict. Street networks, civic buildings, religious precincts, and domestic structures are layered rather than overwritten. The result is a spatial language where older and newer systems support each other, producing cities that feel deeply grounded without appearing trapped in time. This sense of continuity also extends to how architecture meets the landscape: instead of extracting sites from nature, buildings settle into terrain, water systems, and vegetation. Architecture does not stand against the environment; it grows through it.

This relationship shapes how interiors and exteriors are understood. Boundaries are rarely abrupt. Screens, verandahs, courts, platforms, and gardens turn thresholds into zones of transition rather than lines of separation. Climate and culture are the agents of this approach. Heat, humidity, ritual, privacy, and collective life all become design conditions that make the unbuilt as essential as the built. Interiors are ventilated, porous, and dependent on light and air; exteriors are enclosed, sheltered, and socially defined. The two are not opposites — they are interdependent states.

Ultimately, these forms of co-existence are experienced through movement. Sri Lankan architecture is not meant to be understood from a single viewpoint but through the act of walking, pausing, entering, turning, and stepping out again. Space unfolds, redirects, frames, and releases. One becomes aware of climate on the skin, of thresholds underfoot, of sound as a boundary, and of landscape as a spatial participant. Movement turns architecture into experience; it reveals how co-existence is lived rather than theorised.

In this way, Sri Lanka's architecture teaches us that space is not a fixed object but a relationship — sustained across history, ecology, and the everyday gestures of the body.

04a

ARCHITECTURE IN CO-EXISTENCE

Sadiya Sharmin
(PUP24309)

Sri Lanka's built environment is best understood as a product of coexistence, where architecture, landscape, and spatial systems from different periods are layered rather than replaced. Across the island, spaces are designed by accommodating earlier forms, materials, and movement patterns, allowing multiple histories to remain active within the same physical and cultural landscape.

Early architectural spaces emerge directly from terrain, with rock-cut caves and sacred sites shaped by geology and climate. This spatial logic expands during the ancient kingdoms, where monumental stupas, monasteries, and irrigation networks are planned together as one integrated system. Water tanks, canals, and open grounds structure settlements, linking architecture with ecology and ritual movement. At Sigiriya Rock Fortress, design through coexistence is clearly expressed, as architecture, gardens, water, and circulation are carefully organized across a natural landform to shape access, views, and hierarchy.

Later periods introduce compact stone-built cities with axial planning, followed by Kandyan architecture defined by timber construction, pitched roofs, verandahs, and inward-looking courtyards that respond to climate and social life. Colonial interventions add new streets, civic buildings, and institutions, yet adapt to existing settlement structures instead of erasing them, allowing indigenous and colonial spatial systems to function together.

This approach is reinterpreted in the work of Geoffrey Bawa, whose Tropical Modernism designs through coexistence by merging modern architecture with landscape, water, and transitional spaces. Together, these layers reveal Sri Lanka as a place shaped not by singular moments of change, but by continuous spatial coexistence across time.

04b

READING PLACES THROUGH CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Rajvi Shah | PUP24290

Sri Lankan architecture reveals a close relationship between culture and climate, where built form emerges as a response to everyday practices, religious traditions, and tropical environmental conditions. Rather than functioning as isolated objects, buildings and settlements adapt to heat, monsoon rainfall, terrain, and social rituals across scales. In dense urban contexts such as Colombo, inward-looking layouts balance ventilation and privacy, while sacred and historic landscapes like Sigiriya, Dambulla, Anuradhapuram, and Polonnaruwa integrate rock and water systems as climatic and cultural infrastructure. Across regions, architecture adapts rather than dominates, positioning culture and climate as generators of spatial form and lived experience. This continuous negotiation produces environments that are resilient, context-specific, and deeply rooted in place.

04c

BETWEEN THE BUILT AND THE UNBUILT

Nafela Naveed
(UAR20099)

While moving through Sri Lanka, I realized that architecture is something experienced through walking, pausing, and moving between inside and outside. Interiors rarely feel complete on their own; they gain meaning through light, air, vegetation, water, and movement. This became clear as I visited sacred, colonial-influenced, and modern sites, shaping my understanding of the connection between built and unbuilt spaces.

In sacred sites like Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Dambulla, interior space often exists outside the building. The stupas, solid and inaccessible, do not contain ritual; prayer happens around them. The unbuilt: the open ground, trees, sky, and worn paths, becomes the real interior, with the built serving as a reference point. Polonnaruwa, with its ruined temples, showed me that interiority can survive even when walls disappear. In Gangaramaya Temple and Seema Malaka, open courtyards, platforms, and water create places where inside and outside merge, and movement guides how they are experienced. Sacred architecture feels less about enclosure and more about continuity, ritual, and shared presence.

Buildings influenced by colonial spatial language, like De Saram House and Parliament House, were not constructed during the colonial period, but they clearly draw from its vocabulary: layered thresholds, verandahs, courtyards, and controlled circulation. Interiors and exteriors are mediated carefully; privacy comes from depth than solid walls alone, and movement through the spaces is intentional. Even with these historical references, the buildings maintain a strong connection to the surrounding landscape, showing that the unbuilt still plays a central role in how interior spaces are experienced.

Modern tropical architecture, like Lunuganga, House No. 11, and Jetwing Lighthouse, experiments with openness and blending of landscape and architecture. Lunuganga feels raw and personal, where gardens act as rooms, and small structures, even a chicken coop, served as prototypes for larger projects like Parliament. In Galle, Jetwing Lighthouse pushed this idea further. Standing in its circulation spaces, I felt the building negotiating with the ocean rather than framing it. The coastline is not just viewed; it is absorbed. The sea becomes a boundary - a wall of movement and sound, shaping how each corridor, stair, and terrace is experienced. It made me question where the interior begins: at the door, or when the sounds of the ocean fades away.

House No. 11 translates these ideas to the city, where courtyards, level changes, and circulation paths constantly remind one of the exterior. Interiors are only meaningful in relation to what lies outside.

Across these timelines, the way interior and exterior connect shifts: from expansive sacred grounds to layered colonial thresholds to modern experiments with views and compression, but one thing remains: the unbuilt is central to how architecture is experienced. Movement, thresholds, and landscape make interiors alive, showing that Sri Lankan architecture is never just about walls; it's about living with space.

The Eye as Navigator

Daksh Patel

Sri Lankan architecture has long been defined by a profound sensitivity to its tropical context, where the distinction between shelter and the wild remains intentionally porous. For over two millennia, the island's design philosophy has revolved around the harmonious co-existence of the built form and its environment, a relationship where masonry does not conquer the landscape, but rather emerges from it. This synergy is anchored in the way a structure interacts with its site, subtly influencing how one transitions between spaces and perceives the surrounding world.

04d

Sri Lanka

A Layered Architectural Continuum

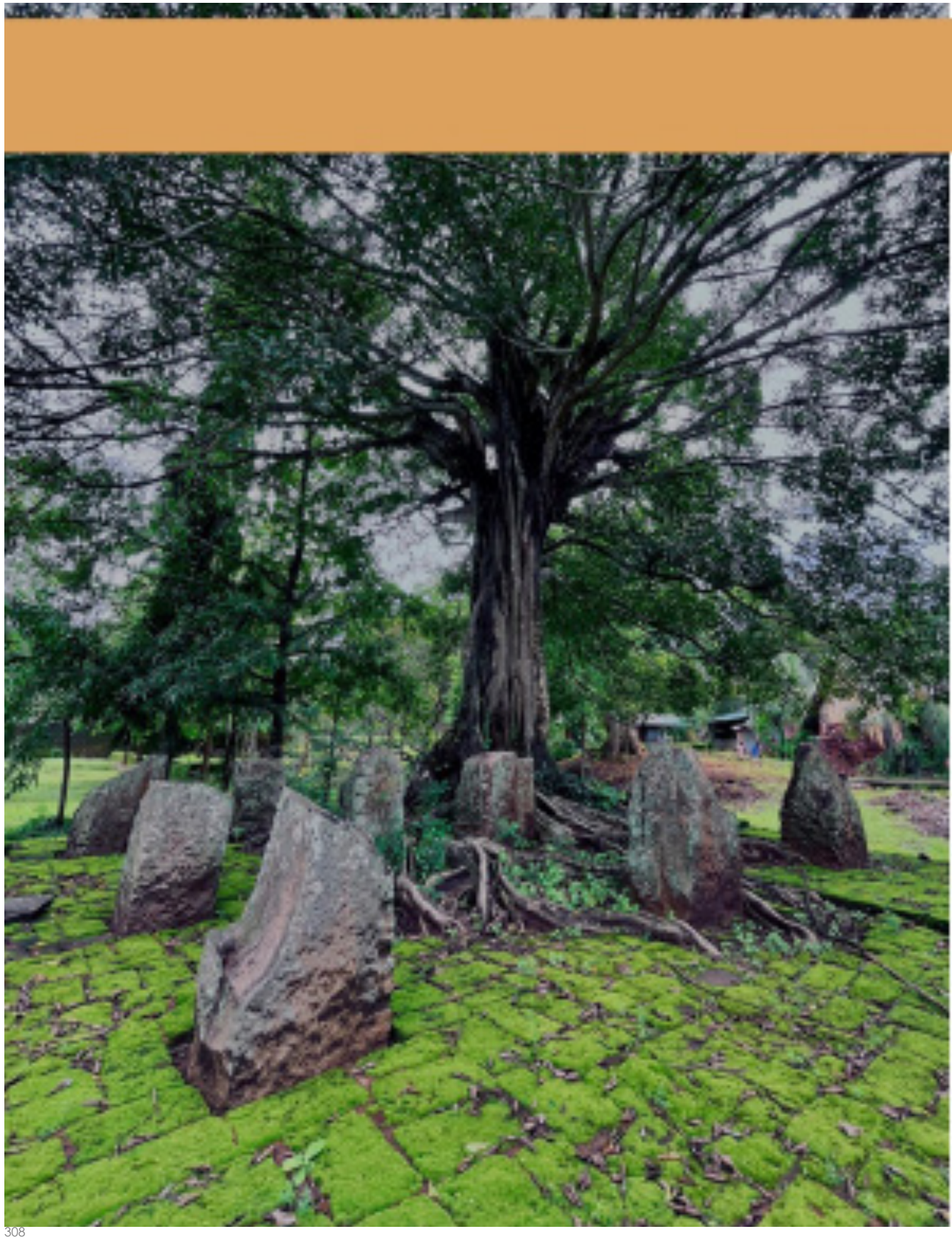
Sri Lankan architecture is shaped by **coexistence rather than replacement**, where multiple architectural eras continue to exist within the same spatial and environmental framework.

From early rock-cut caves and ancient cities to colonial buildings and contemporary interventions, new forms are consistently layered onto existing landscapes instead of erasing them.

This continuity produces a built environment where ***sacred, civic, residential, and commercial architectures from different periods remain functionally active today***.

Coexistence in Sri Lanka is therefore not a stylistic condition but a spatial and urban logic, allowing history, landscape, and modern life to operate simultaneously as part of a living architectural continuum.

READING SRI LANKA THROUGH ITS LANDSCAPE



Before architecture, there was **terrain, rock, forest, and water**. Early Sri Lankan settlements and sacred spaces did not impose form onto nature—they emerged from it.

Throughout this journey across Sri Lanka, we repeatedly witness how **nature takes the first role**, shaping space, movement, and meaning long before architecture intervenes. Across centuries and regions, the built environment does not compete with the landscape but exists in complete coexistence with it. **Rock becomes shelter, trees define thresholds, water organizes settlement, and terrain directs circulation.**

Architecture evolves by carefully reading these natural conditions. Structures respond to **climate, slope, vegetation, and monsoon patterns,** allowing light, air, and water to flow through spaces rather than be blocked by them. Sacred and civic spaces are often discovered within the landscape, where natural formations already suggest enclosure, ritual, and pause.

This deep integration results in an architecture that is modest yet powerful—rooted in **context and resilient over time.** Rather than dominating its surroundings, Sri Lankan architecture ***reinforces the landscape, allowing both nature and the built form to grow together, continuously shaping one another across time.***

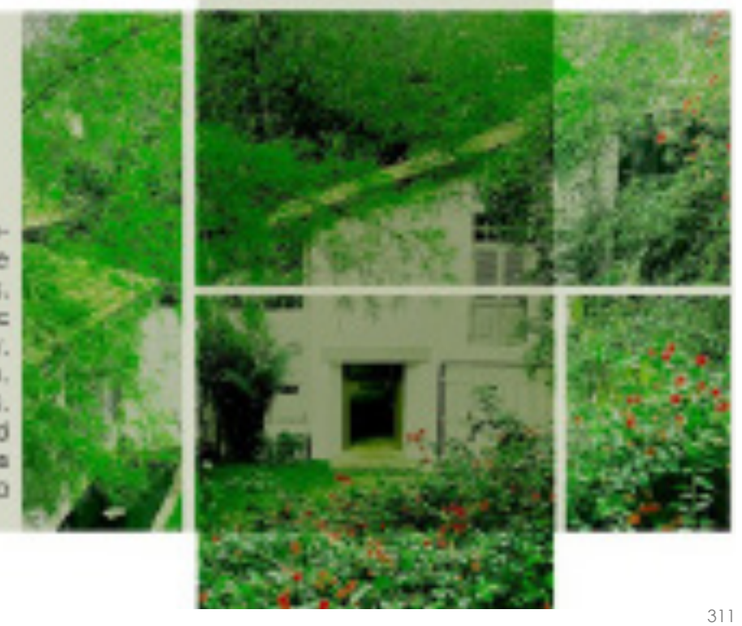
SRI LANKAN ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE

At ***Sigiriya Lion Rock Fortress***, landscape acts as the primary architectural framework. The rock outcrop determines defense, movement, and ritual, while gardens, water channels, and terraces extend architecture into the terrain.
Built form is minimal and strategic, allowing geology, water, and vegetation to define space, hierarchy, and experience—making the landscape itself the first act of design.

In ***Heritance Kandalama*** by Geoffrey Bawa, architecture recedes to let landscape lead. The building follows the hillside, dissolving into forest through creeping vegetation, shaded corridors, and framed views. Nature penetrates the built form, blurring inside and outside, reinforcing coexistence where architecture grows out of the landscape rather than sitting upon it.

At ***Polonnaruwa***, landscape operates as the primary ordering system long before built form appears. The city is structured through water, terrain, and vegetation—where reservoirs, canals, and forest clearings define settlement extents, movement, and hierarchy. Architecture is inserted sparingly within this larger ecological framework, responding to topography and hydrology rather than overriding them.

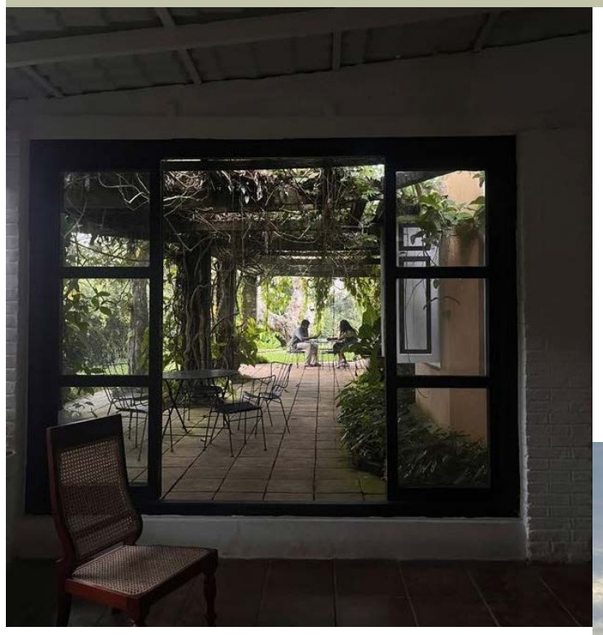
At the ***De Saram House***, this logic re-emerges in a contemporary setting. The house is shaped around existing trees, garden courts, and microclimatic conditions, allowing landscape to play. Walls dissolve into verandahs, courtyards, and shaded thresholds, blurring the line between inside and outside. Rather than treating nature as backdrop, the house is composed as a sequence of garden-led spaces.

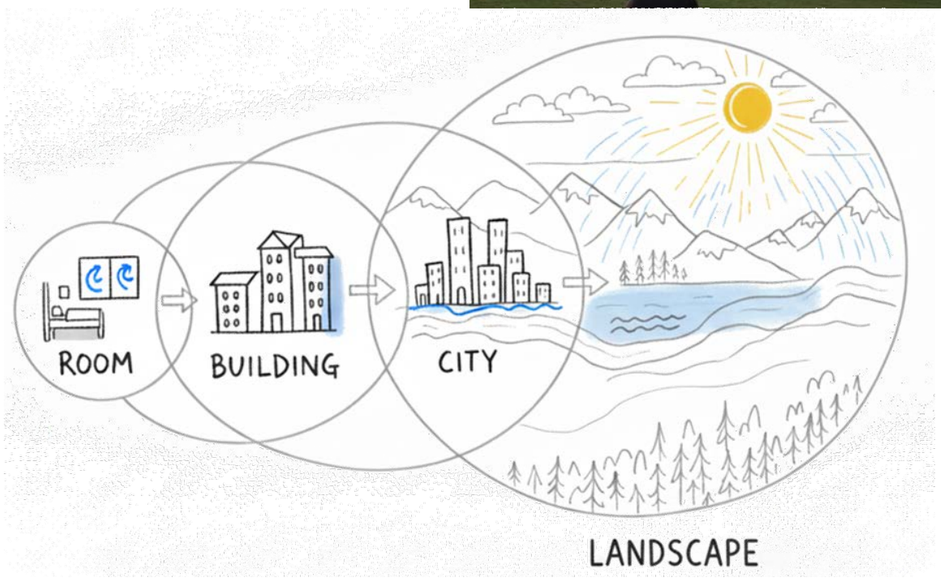


Reading Places Through Culture and Climate

a From Ancient Landscapes to Urban Present

Reading Across Scales





Architecture is read as an outcome of cultural practice and climatic adaptation.

Climate operates across scales—from interior comfort to territorial planning.

Culture organizes movement, ritual, and spatial hierarchy.

Built form emerges through negotiation rather than imposition.

Across the diverse landscapes of Sri Lanka, the concept of movement defines the boundary between the built and the natural. By removing a primary axis, the architecture forces the eye to wander and the body to explore, ensuring that the interior and exterior are no longer separate entities, but a single, fluid experience.

SACRED CITIES AND SPATIAL ORDER

In the sacred sites we visited, I rarely felt a clear moment of "entering" architecture. Instead, I felt myself entering a condition.

DAMBULLA CAVE TEMPLE

What: Major rock-hewn Buddhist temple complex

When: Origins date to the 1st century BCE, with additions over centuries

Location: Central Province (near Sigiriya)

ANURADHAPURA

What: Ancient sacred city and major early capital of Sri Lanka

When: Founded c. 4th century BCE, flourishing until 11th century CE

Location: North Central Province

POLONNURAWA

What: Medieval capital of Sri Lanka

When: Peak between 10th–13th century CE

Location: North Central Province

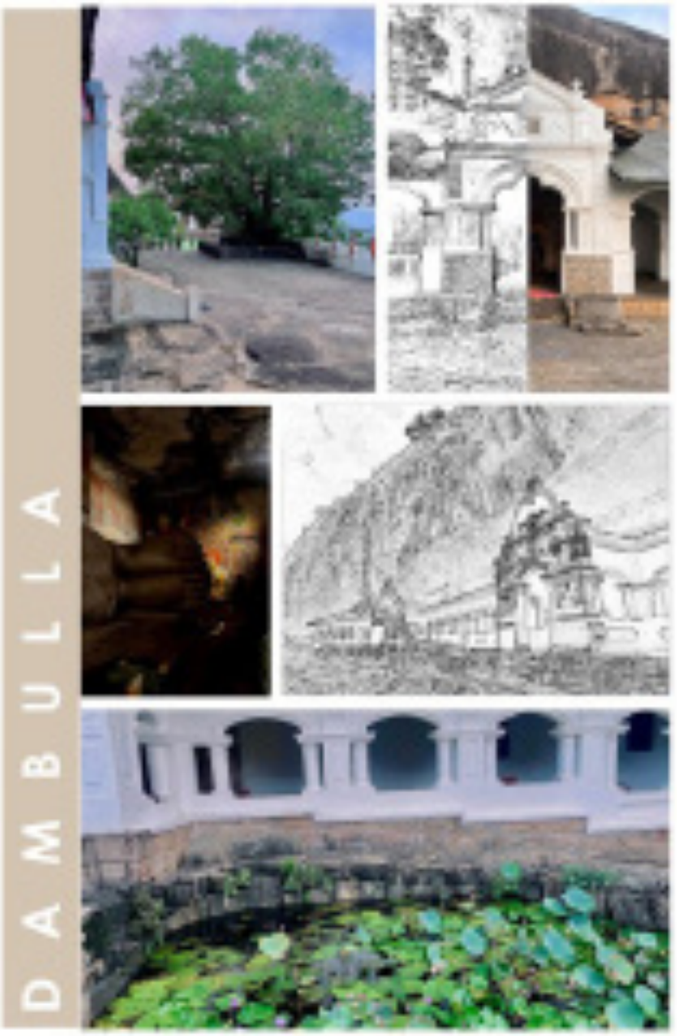
SIGIRIYA

What: Ancient rock fortress and palace complex

When: Built c. 477–495 CE under King Kasyapa

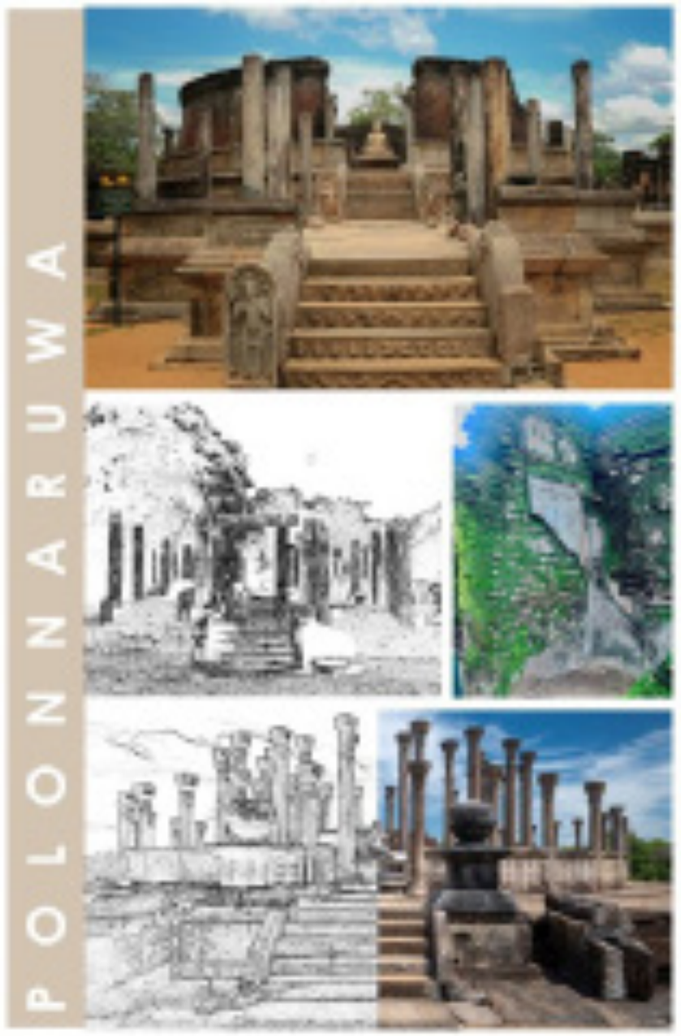
Location: Central Province, near Dambulla

ANCIENT CITIES SHAPED BY LANDSCAPE



At **Dambulla Caves**, architecture is discovered rather than constructed: rock formations become enclosure, shade, and structure, with built additions carefully negotiating existing terrain and geology.

Built elements—such as platforms, retaining edges, and surface treatments—are additive rather than transformative.



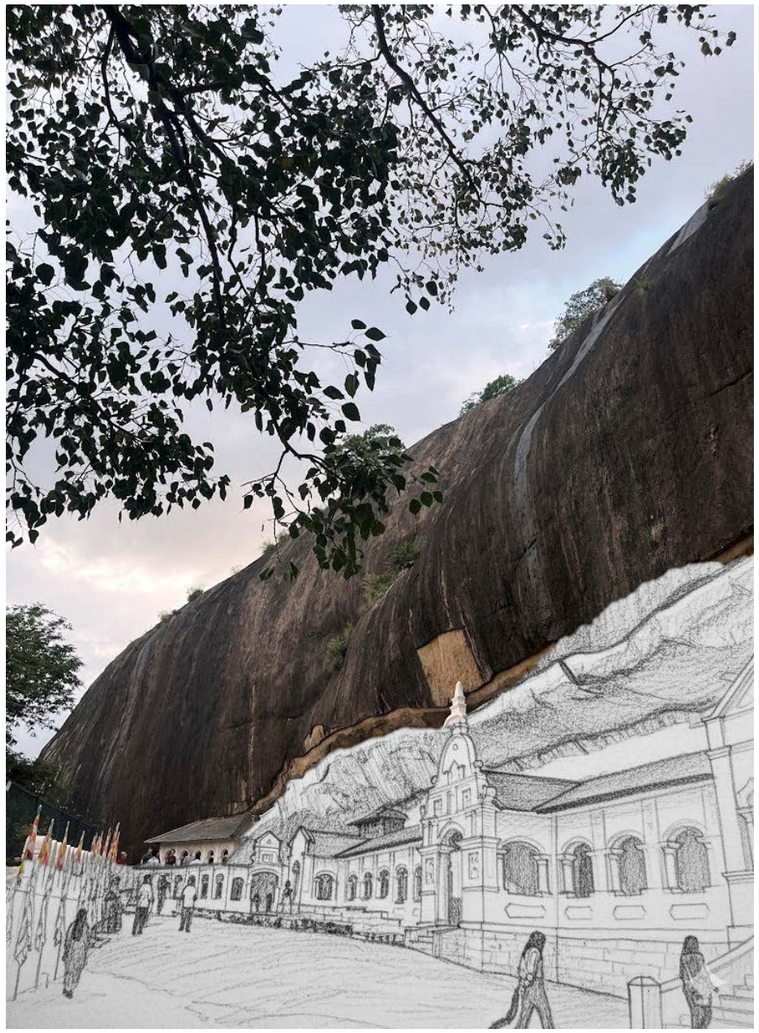
Polonnaruwa demonstrates landscape-driven urban planning at a city scale. The urban structure is governed by an extensive water management system comprising tanks, canals, and spillways that regulate agriculture, domestic use, and flood control.

Open spaces and forest buffers function as ecological infrastructure, ensuring climatic comfort and environmental resilience within the urban system.

Anuradhapura is an experience of vastness revealed through long axial paths, where ruins, water courts, and stupas appear gradually, much like the layered images that merge drawing and reality.

Architecture, landscape, and symbolism exist simultaneously, with moonstones, thresholds, and tanks continuing to guide movement.

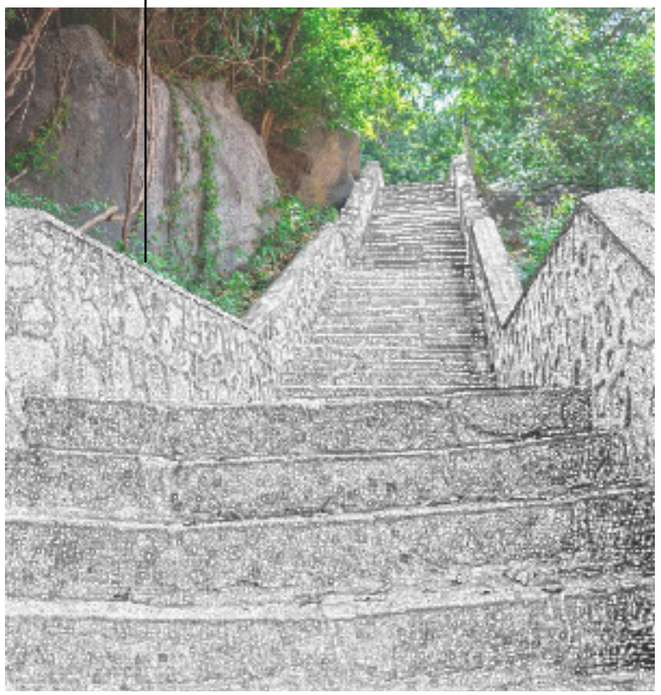
Dambulla: Enclosed Earth



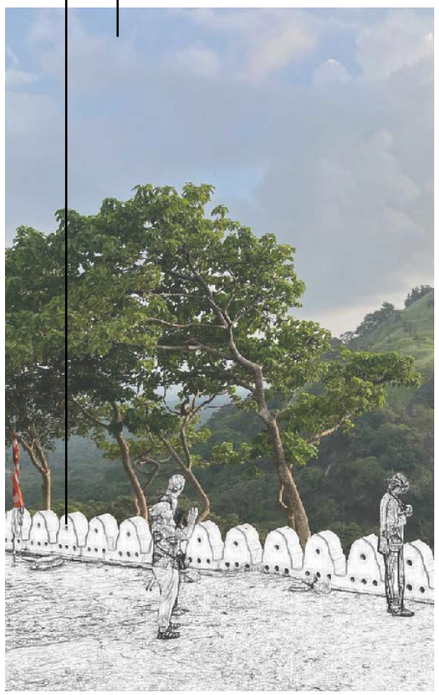
At **Dambulla Cave Temple,** sacred space is carved directly into the rock, allowing caves to maintain stable internal temperatures despite external heat and humidity. The rock surface acts as thermal mass, while minimal intervention preserves natural airflow and shelter. Here, architecture does not dominate the landscape but emerges from it, revealing a cultural approach that treats climate and terrain as integral components of sacred form rather than obstacles to overcome.

Sacred space is created through excavation, allowing thermal stability and enclosure

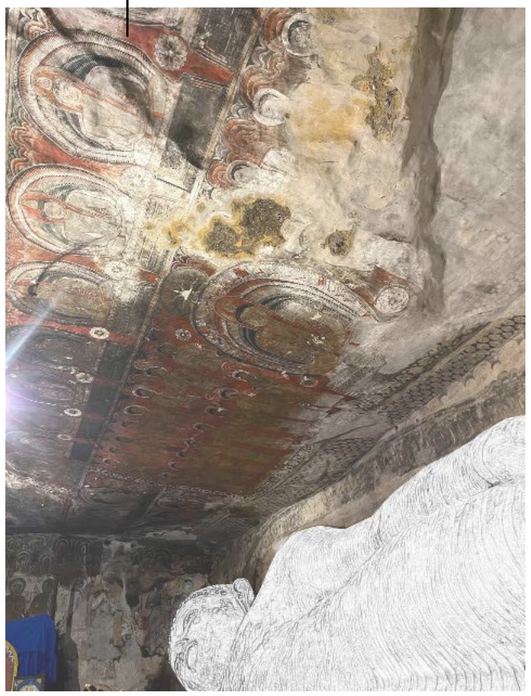
Built meeting the Unbuilt



View from cave entrance over exterior landscape



Interiorness produced by shelter, not construction



Climb > Exposure > Shelter

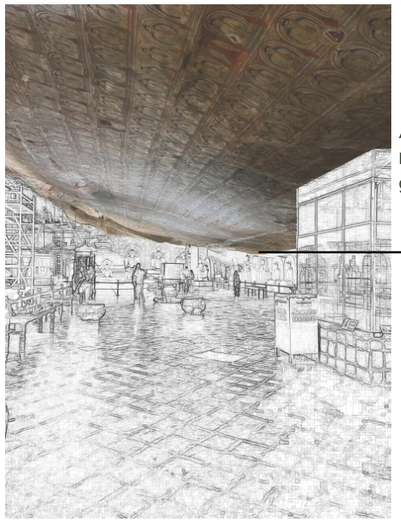
Transitional path connects climb, shelter, and landscape

Movement through space defines the sacred experience

Transitional corridor connecting interior and exterior

The built and the unbuilt become inseparable with the unbuilt flowing into the built and vice versa

Human scale



Architecture meets geology

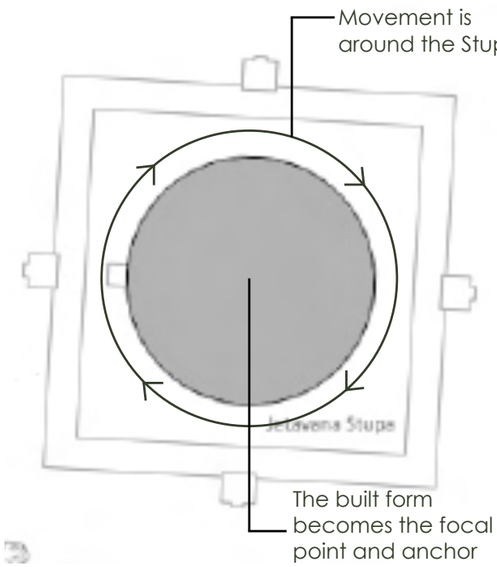
The landscape performs as the enclosure and creates the space

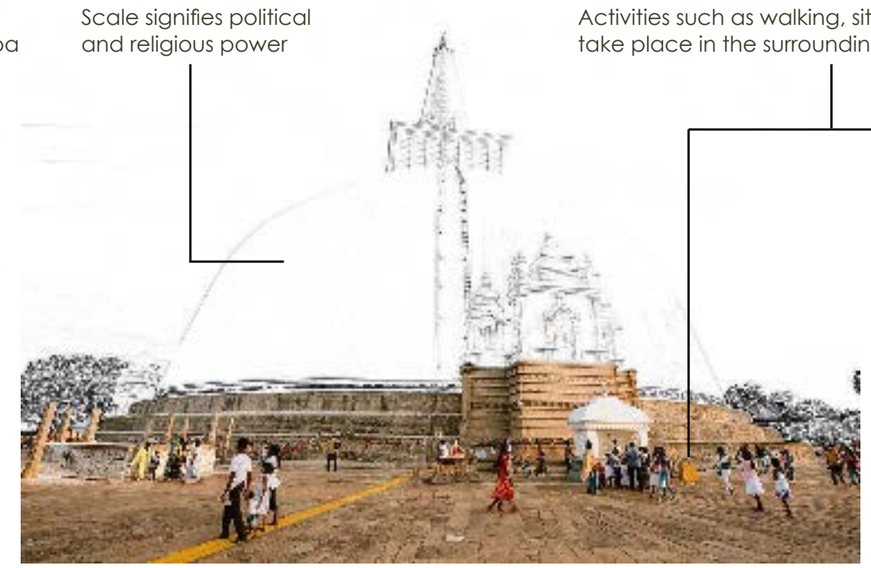
At Dambulla, the experience was physically demanding. The climb under heat and exposure made the eventual shelter of the caves feel earned.

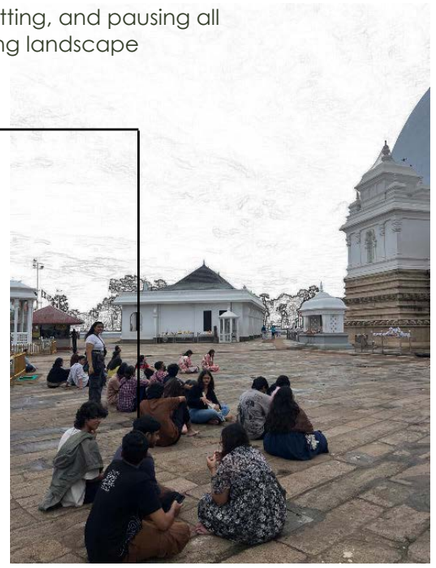
What is interesting is that the most sacred interior is also the most geologically raw. Rock ceilings drip, surfaces are uneven, and the boundary between architecture and nature collapses entirely.

I found myself questioning whether these caves are interiors at all, or simply moments where landscape temporarily encloses the body.

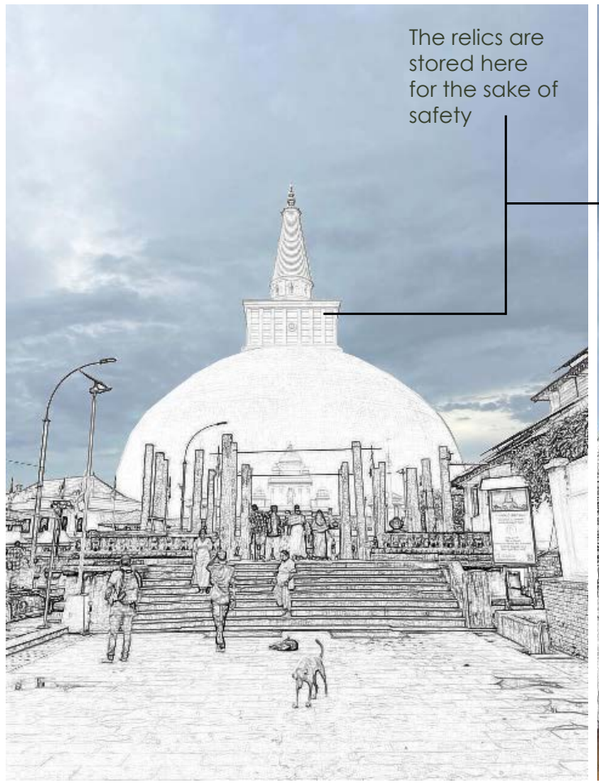
DAMBULLA CAVE TEMPLE

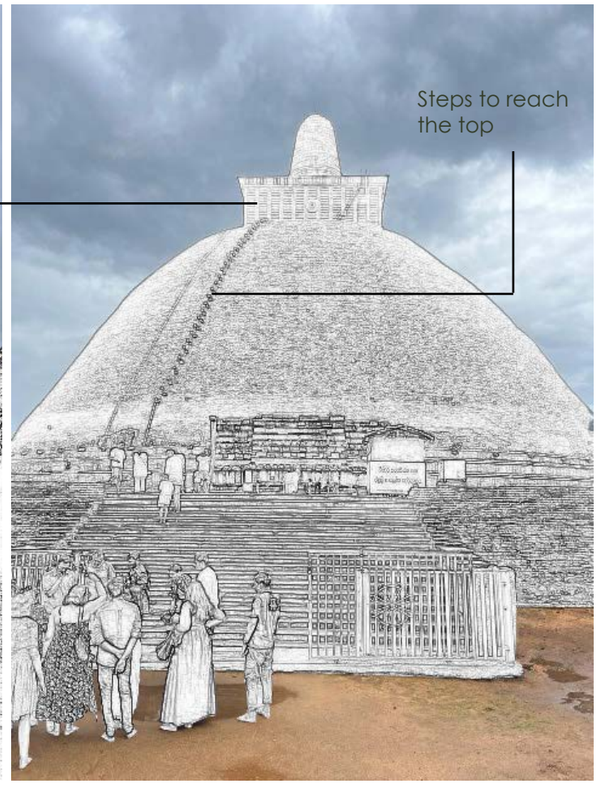




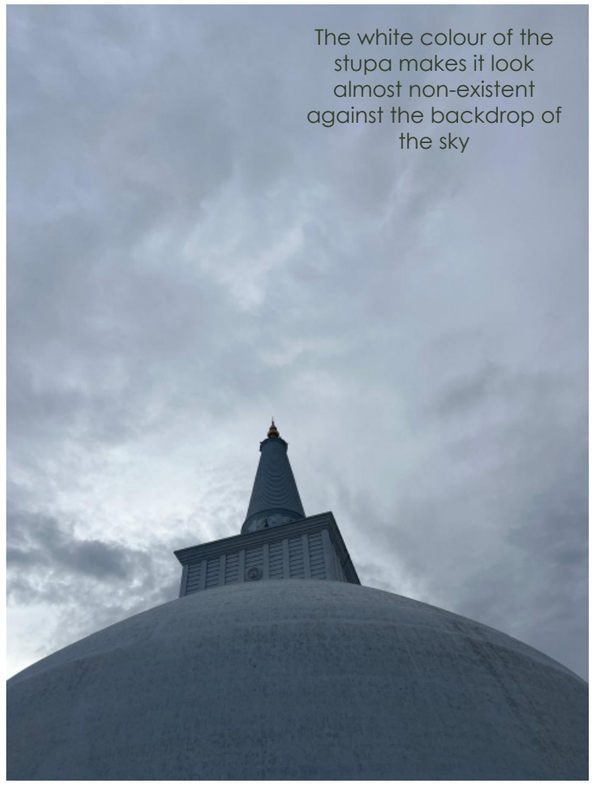


The unbuilt ground becomes the functional sacred interior (activated through occupation)





The stupas are solid and inaccessible



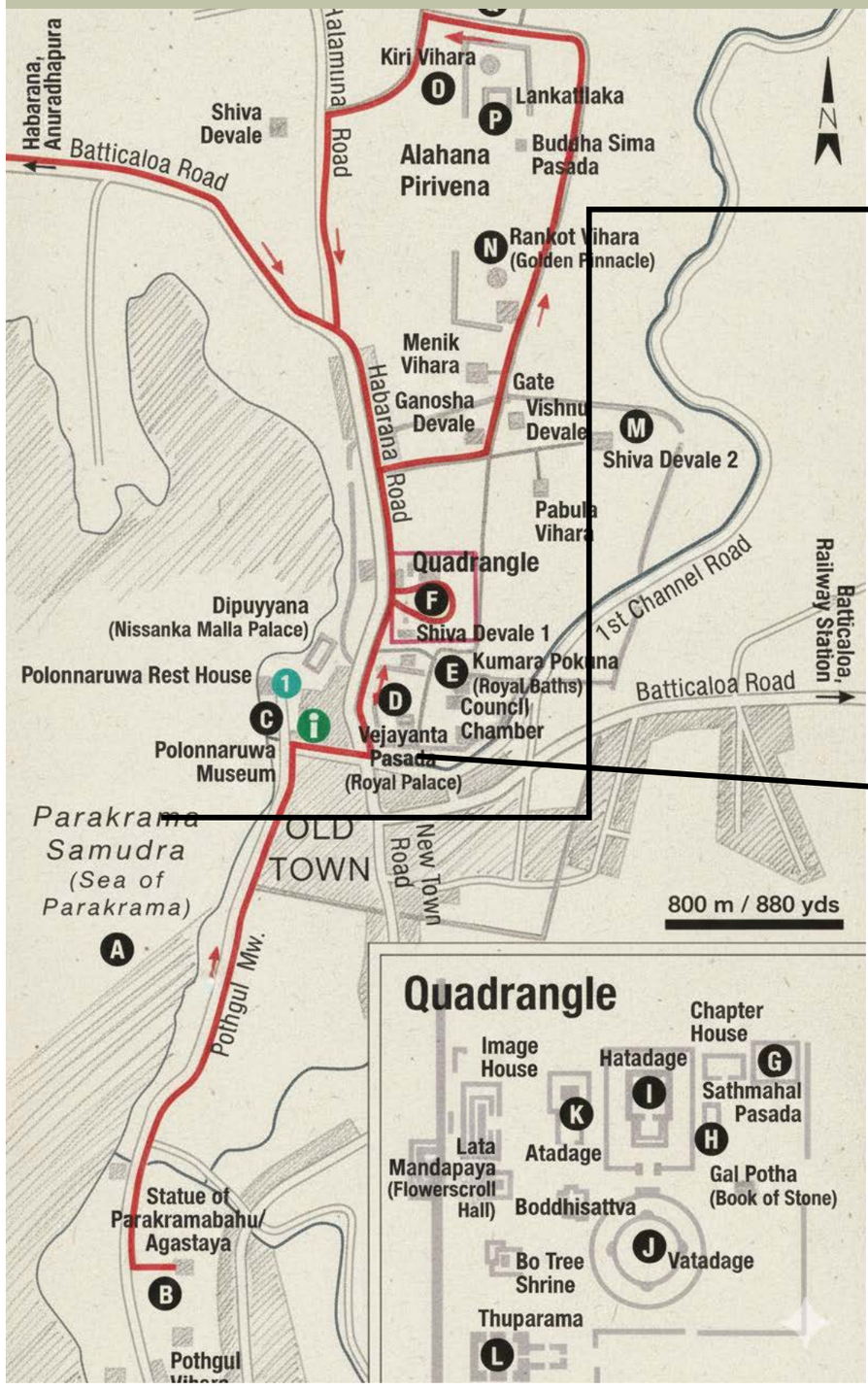
blends into the sky

In Anuradhapura, spending a day moving through the sacred city fundamentally altered my understanding of interior, exterior, and monumentality. Unlike later traditions where sacredness is concentrated within enclosed interiors, Anuradhapura disperses ritual across vast open ground. Movement is devotional: long walks under the sun, pauses in shade, and repeated gestures of circumambulation.

What struck me most was that the stupas themselves have no inhabitable interior. These monumental forms are solid, closed, and inaccessible. Prayer does not happen inside them, but around them. The circular geometry of the stupa eliminates a clear front or direction, encouraging continuous movement without hierarchy. The ground plane, trees, open sky, and worn paths together form a collective interior without walls. The stupas act as anchors around which movement organizes space. Their scale ensures permanence over centuries, but it also conveys a sense of power, asserting religious and political presence.

This inversion unsettles conventional logic: the built is monumental but inert; the unbuilt is active, inhabited, and charged. Interiority is produced not by enclosure but by occupation. The circular form reinforces a non-directional spatial order, aligned with a religious philosophy that privileges inward reflection and meditation. The stupa externalizes interiority, pushing ritual and gathering outward into the landscape. Architecture is most alive in the unbuilt, while the monument provides orientation and focus.

Polonnaruwa: Ancient City's Water Logic



Parakrama Samudra- shallow reservoir, consisting of three separate reservoirs connected by narrow channels

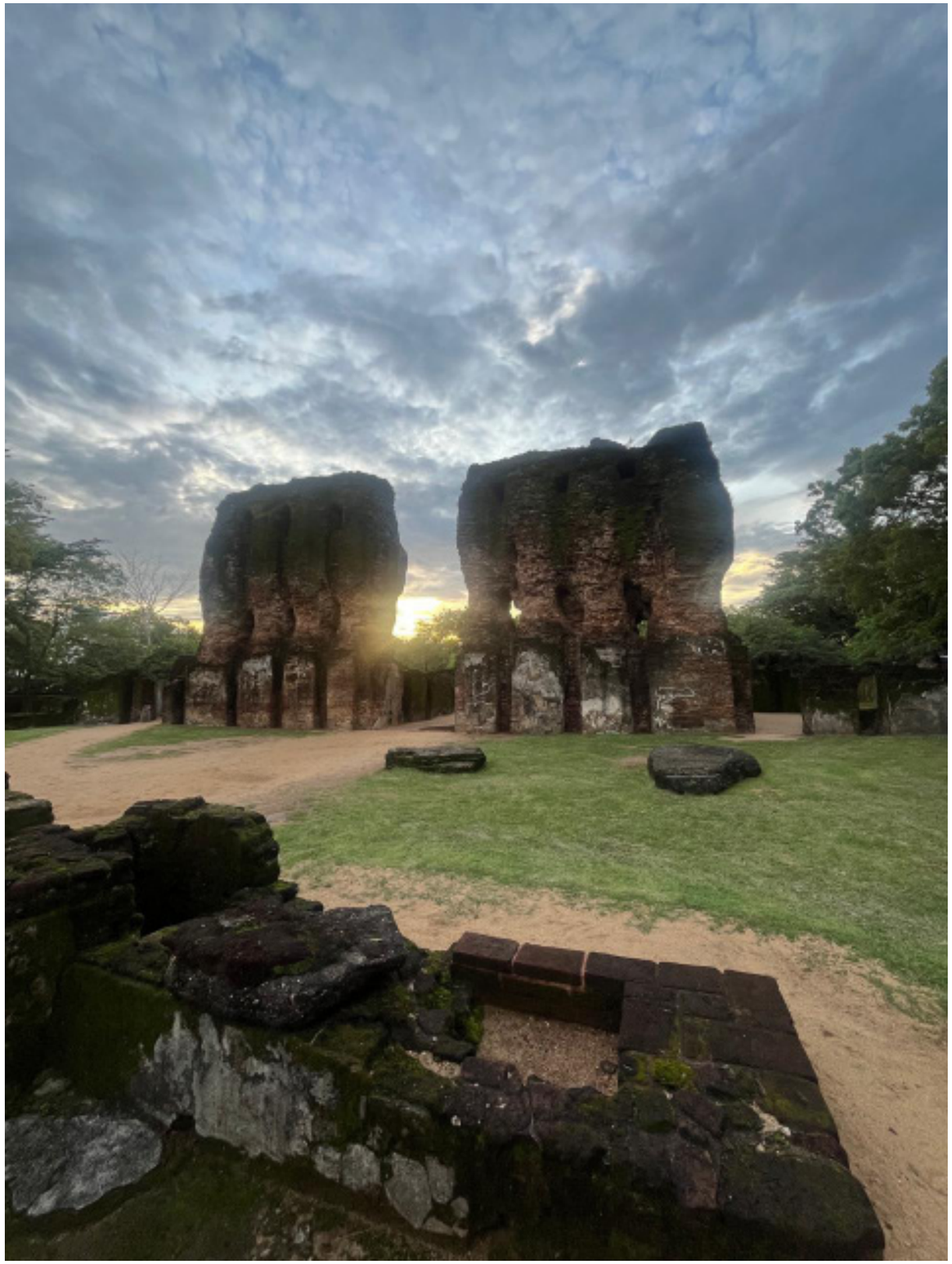
Royal Palace remains naturally cool despite the heat. Its resorvoir location channels a constant cold breeze through the structure, which features a unique architectural blend

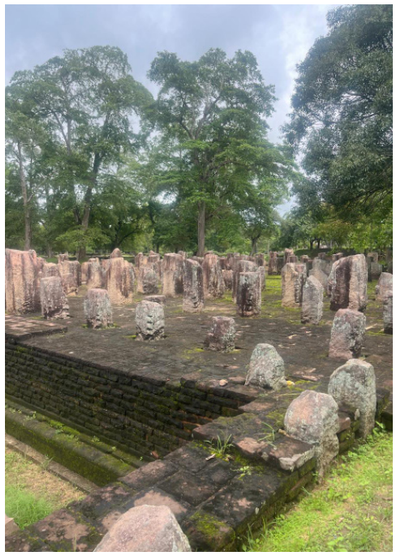
Bathing pool for the royalties They have proper drainage and pipeline system clean water comes out from the dragon mouth near the staircase

The ancient cities of **Anuradhapuram and Polonnaruwa** demonstrate how settlement planning was fundamentally shaped by the integration of water, ritual, and climate. Large-scale water tanks functioned as climatic infrastructure, capturing monsoon rainfall and redistributing it throughout the year for agriculture, daily use, and ecological balance. These tanks were not treated as purely utilitarian systems but were deeply embedded within religious and cultural frameworks, often aligned with monasteries and sacred precincts.

Settlement patterns and axial planning were closely linked to ritual movement, connecting water bodies, religious structures, and civic spaces through clearly defined spatial hierarchies. The orientation and distribution of built form responded to seasonal cycles, ensuring resilience during periods of drought and heavy rainfall. At a city scale, climate responsiveness was inseparable from cultural belief systems, producing urban forms where environmental management and spiritual life were mutually reinforcing.

Water systems structure settlement, ritual, and ecological balance.

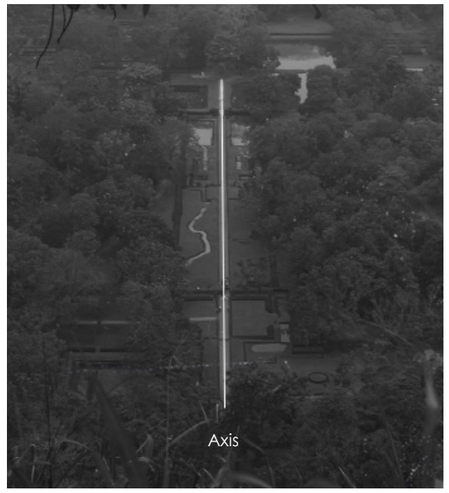


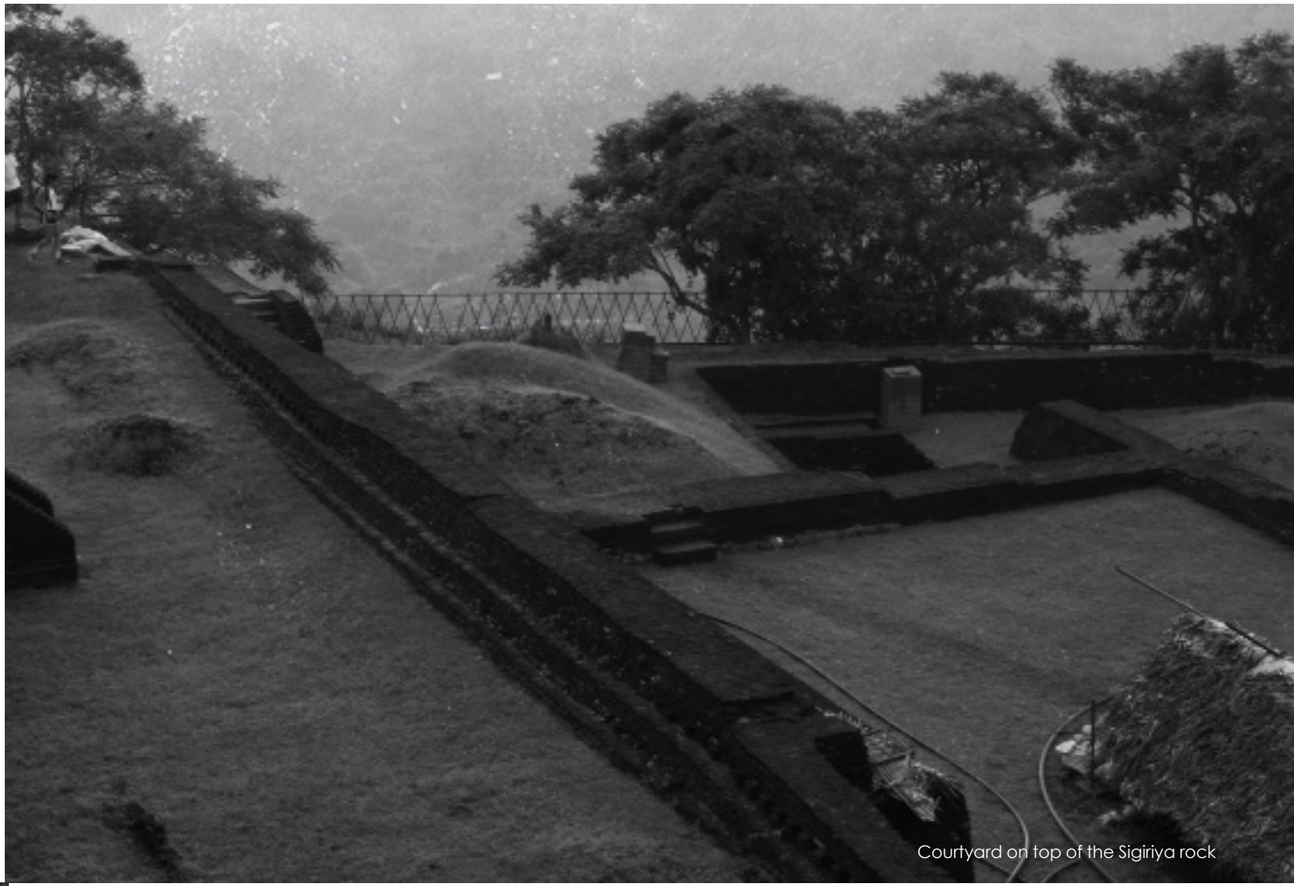


Walking through Polonnaruwa, this idea appears in a more fragmented and exposed form. Here, walls, platforms, columns, and thresholds remain, but roofs and enclosures have largely disappeared. What was once interior space is now fully absorbed into the landscape. Movement across these ruins collapses distinctions between inside and outside entirely: the body occupies former interiors as open ground.

Unlike Anuradhapura's intact stupas, Polonnaruwa reveals how interiority can persist even after architecture has physically eroded. The alignment of columns, the raised plinths, and the sequence of spaces still guide movement and ritual imagination. The unbuilt does not erase architecture; it completes it over time. Together, Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa suggest that Sri Lankan sacred space has long been conceived to survive, both spiritually and spatially, even when its enclosure erodes over time.

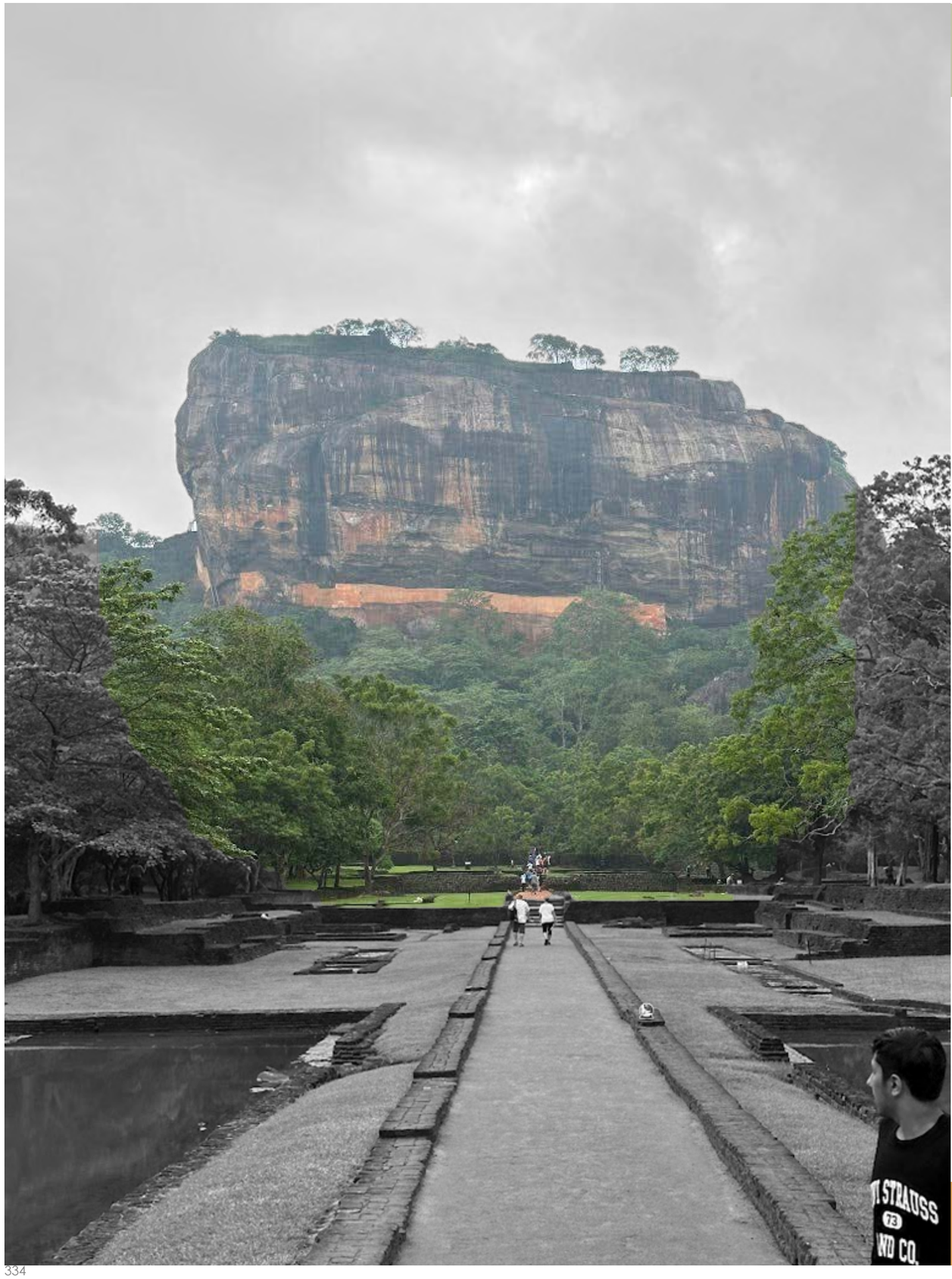
POLONNURAWA



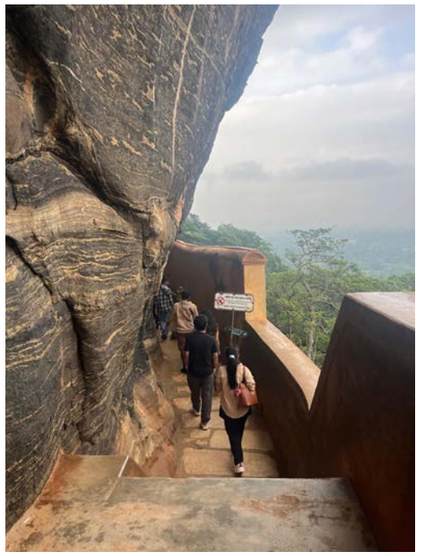

Courtyard on top of the Sigiriya rock

The Movement of Devotion: Ancient Cities

In the ancient capitals of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, movement is a ritual. The grid based layouts and dominant primary axes create a sense of order and hierarchy. Here, movement is Processional, you are guided along a clear, symmetrical path toward a sacred destination, such as a Stupa. This structured navigation reflects a collective spiritual purpose where the architecture declares a primary direction, grounding the visitor in a predictable, stable direction.

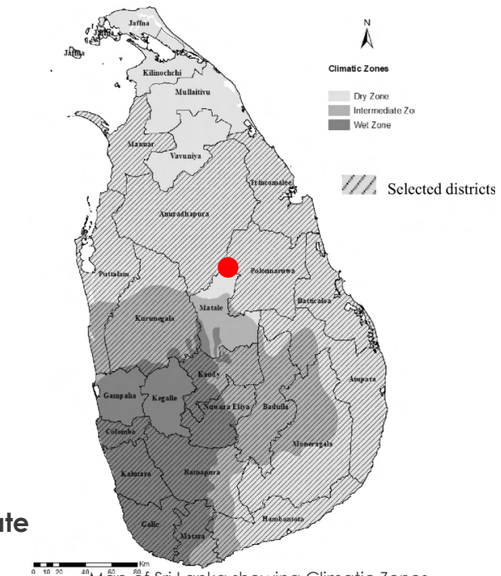


Sigiriya: Sacred Landscapes



At **Sigiriya**, architecture emerges through the deliberate shaping of the rock itself. The rock is cut, terraced, and organized to create elevated platforms and controlled access, using its mass and height to provide protection from heat, monsoon rains, and potential threats. Rather than imposing construction onto the terrain, the natural topography is strategically transformed to express power, visibility, and climatic intelligence. Surrounding water gardens further extend this logic, regulating microclimate and managing seasonal rainfall as integral components of the sculpted landscape.

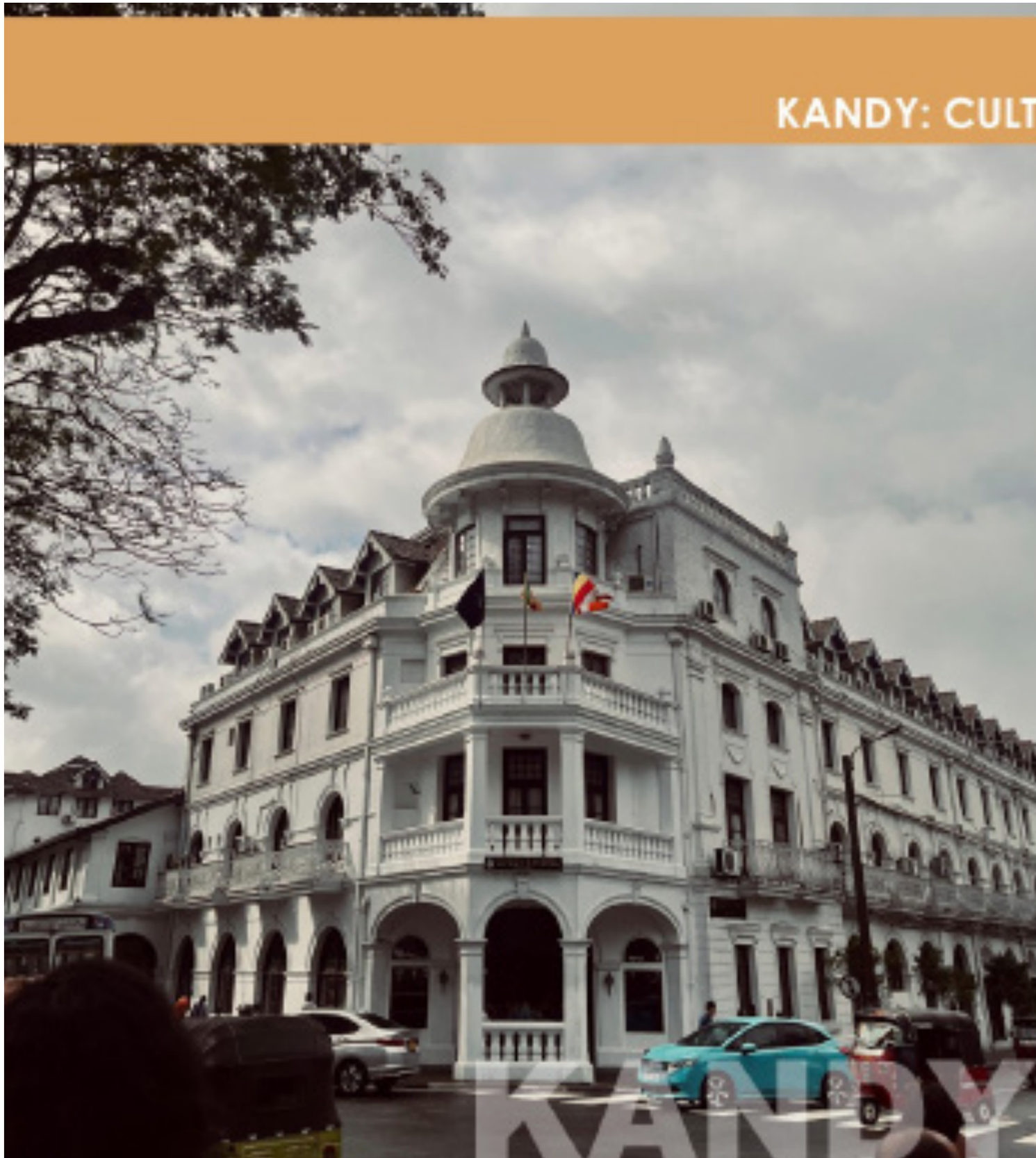
Zone: Tropical Dry Climate



Map of Sri Lanka showing Climatic Zones

Topography functions as shelter, defence, and climatic mass.

KANDY: CULTURE, TOPOGRAPHY & TRADITION



Kandy is a city where **urban form *is inseparable from topography***, cultural identity, and longstanding traditions. Located within a valley and structured around hills and the Kandy Lake, the city's growth has been strongly guided by terrain, resulting in compact development, defined visual corridors, and controlled movement networks.

Kandy's **architectural character reflects its layered history.** Indigenous Kandyan architecture associated with religious and royal functions coexists with colonial-era buildings introduced during British rule. Structures such as administrative buildings, hotels, and civic institutions adopt colonial typologies like arcades, verandahs, and symmetrical façades, adapted to the hill climate.

Culturally, Kandy remains a **living religious and ceremonial center**, shaped by the presence of the Temple of the Tooth Relic and associated processional routes. Everyday commerce, tourism, and civic life operate alongside ritual practices, reinforcing coexistence between tradition and modern urban use.

Kandy demonstrates how landscape, culture, and inherited urban structures together guide growth—resulting in a city that evolves carefully while retaining its historical and cultural continuity.

KANDY: CULTURE, TOPOGRAPHY & TRADITION

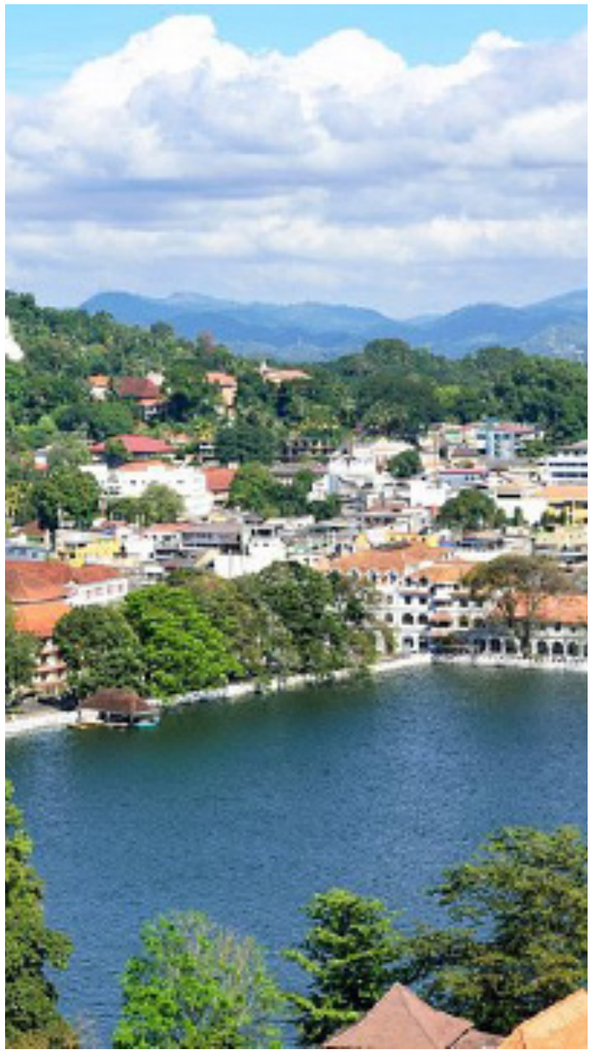
At the heart of Kandy lies the close spatial and cultural relationship between ***the Temple of the Tooth Relic and Kandy Lake***, together forming the city's primary sacred and urban core. The temple organizes ritual movement, hierarchy, and ceremonial routes, anchoring the city's cultural life. Kandy Lake acts as a symbolic and environmental buffer, shaping urban edges, views, and climate. Together, they integrate religion, landscape, and urban form, defining Kandy's structure and identity.

KANDYAN ARCHITECTURE

THE GRADUAL THRESHOLD

Movement unfolds through layered courtyards, shifting ground levels, and subtle alignments - less an arrival and more a slow attuning to place.

ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS



CITY WITHIN THE LANDSCAPE

TEMPLE OF THE TOOTH

In Kandy, I felt the relationship between architecture and landscape shift. After places like Dambulla, where nature sets the terms, Kandy felt more intentional. The buildings controlled how I moved, where I paused, and what I noticed.

I became very aware of thresholds. Timber columns, roof overhangs, and open verandas created spaces that weren't fully outside or inside. Standing there, I felt the shade as part of the building. Boundaries felt soft, almost negotiable, like the architecture was breathing with the climate.

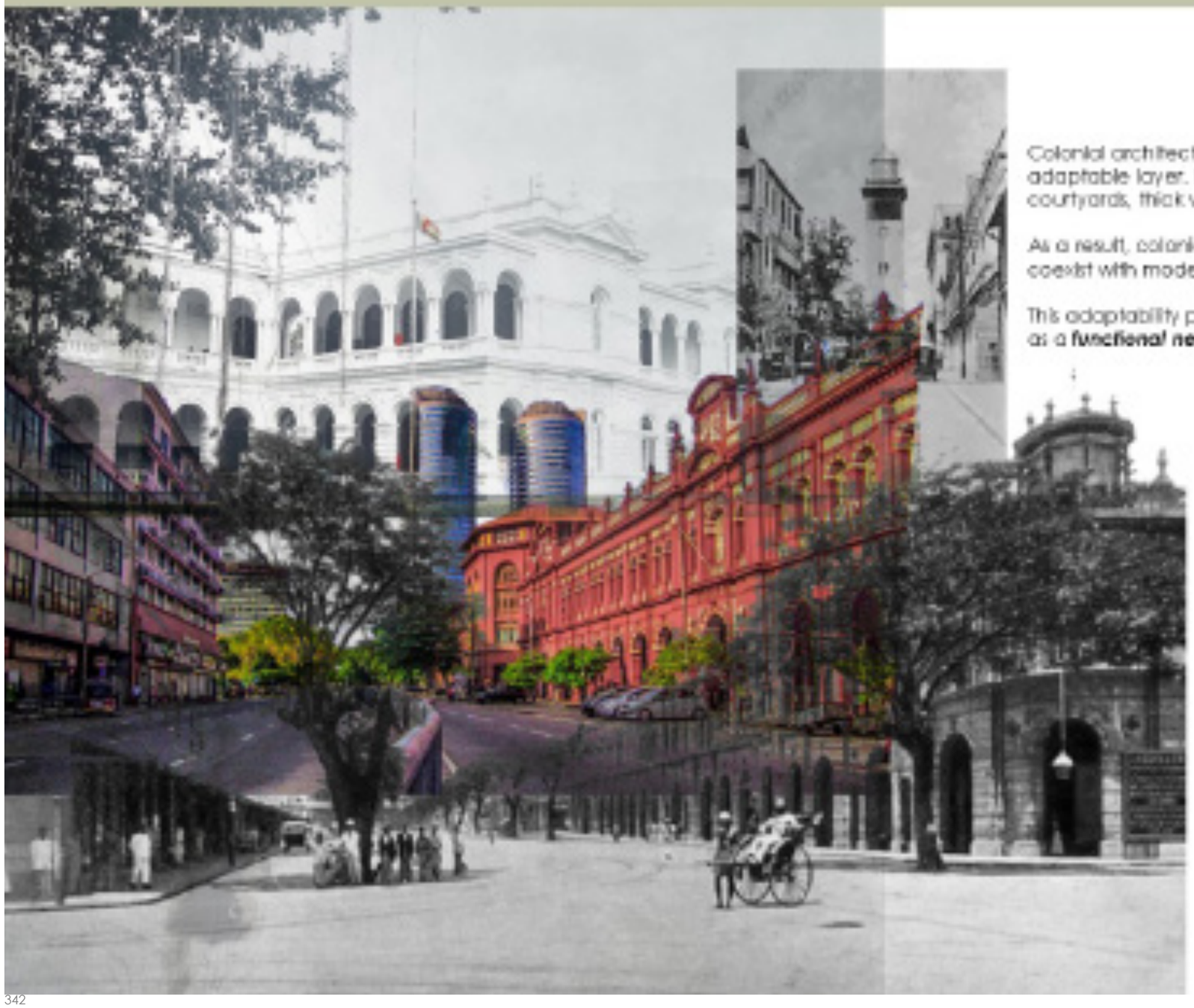
Even just from the outside, the Temple of the Tooth made this clear. The lake, the terraces, the approac, all of it felt like part of the temple. It was obvious that the sacred space continues into the city.

What stood out to me most was how everything sat within the landscape. The city holds its buildings on slopes and hills, almost like the terrain is curating the view. Architecture doesn't dominate the greenery; it receives it. The backdrop of trees, the changing levels of the ground, the water: all of this became part of the spatial experience.

I thought of the arcitecture in Kandy not as rooms, but more as an atmosphere.

Colonial Architecture

As An Adaptive Layer Across Sri lanka



Colonial architecture in Sri Lanka survives not as a dominant imposition but as an adaptable layer. Buildings designed with climatic intelligence—deep verandahs, courtyards, thick walls—continue to function effectively in contemporary use.

As a result, colonial structures are reused rather than replaced, allowing them to coexist with modern development.

This adaptability prevents architectural obsolescence and reinforces coexistence as a **functional necessity**, not merely a cultural choice.

COLOMBO: A PALIMPSEST CITY IN USE

Colombo functions as a palimpsest city where layers of history, architecture, and urban life coexist and remain actively in use. Its urban form has evolved through successive phases—pre-colonial port settlements, Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial planning, post-independence modernization, and contemporary global-city aspirations—each adding a new layer without fully erasing the previous one.

Architecturally, Colombo displays a continuous overlap of styles. Colonial-era buildings with arcades, courtyards, and verandahs coexist alongside modernist civic structures, post-independence institutional architecture, informal commercial adaptations, and contemporary high-rise developments.

Urban transformation in Colombo is incremental rather than tabula rasa. Streets remain active interfaces where multiple time periods meet: colonial façades accommodate contemporary signage, new infrastructure inserts itself within historic street grids, and everyday practices adapt spaces beyond their original intent.

Colombo's strength lies in this simultaneity. The city is not defined by a single architectural identity, but by its ability to absorb change while retaining memory—making it a living, working palimpsest shaped by both history and everyday use.

COLOMBO: A PALIMPSEST CITY IN USE

Colombo developed as a strategic colonial port city under Portuguese, Dutch, and British rule, each phase leaving a distinct imprint on its urban structure and architecture. Colombo's colonial core, particularly the ***Fort area***, continues to shape the city's urban identity.

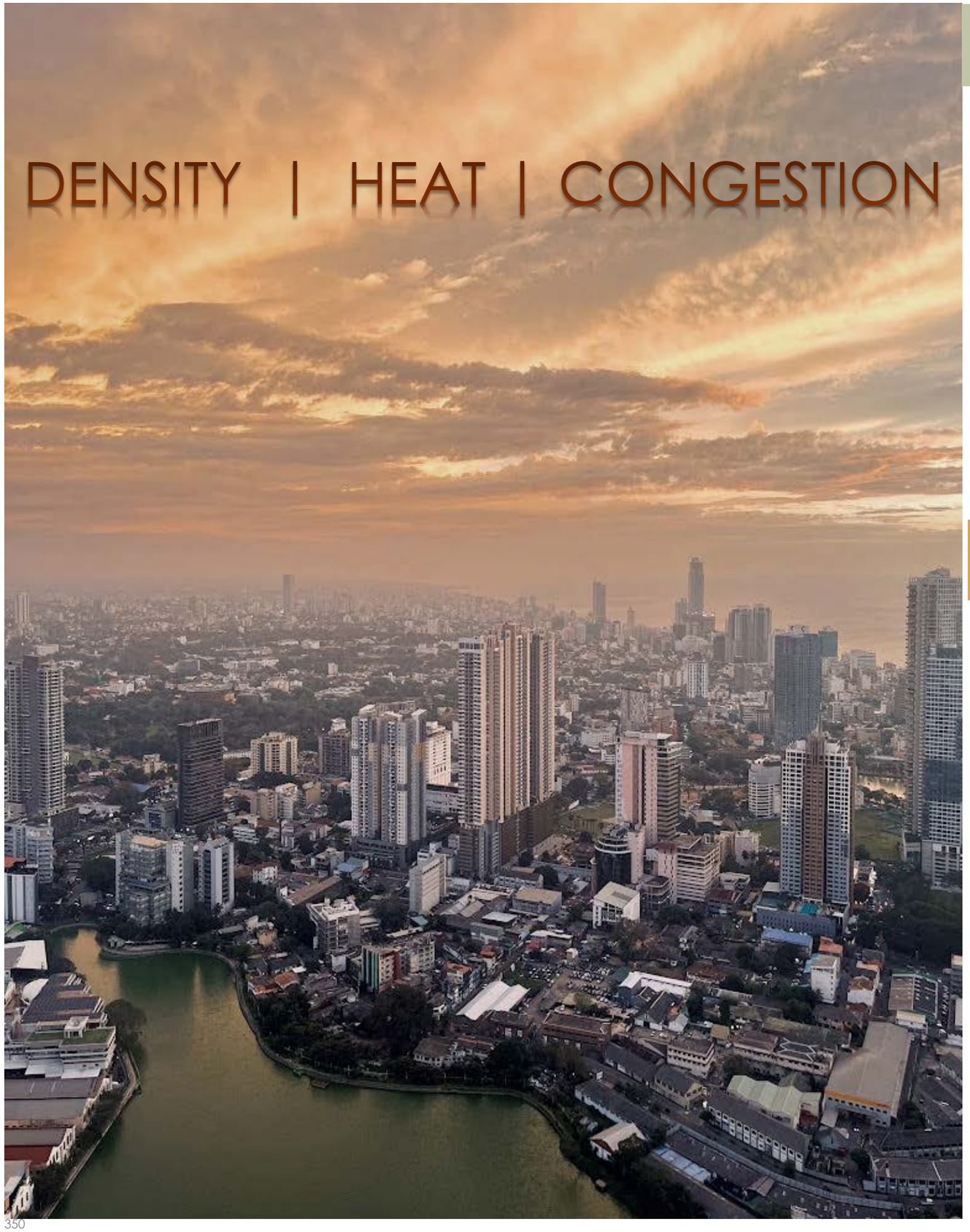
Developed as an administrative and commercial centre under colonial rule, the area is defined by arcaded streets, climate-responsive façades, and strong street edges. Rather than being preserved as a static heritage zone, these buildings remain in active use, supporting contemporary economic functions.

COLOMBO: A PALIMPSEST CITY IN USE

In ***present-day Colombo***, multiple architectural styles, cultural practices, and urban systems coexist simultaneously, shaping a city that is layered yet functional. Religious structures, colonial institutions, post-independence public buildings, and contemporary high-rise developments ***occupy the same urban landscape, often within close proximity***.

Rather than replacing earlier layers, new development inserts itself alongside them, allowing continuity across time. This coexistence is reflected not only in built form but also in everyday urban life.

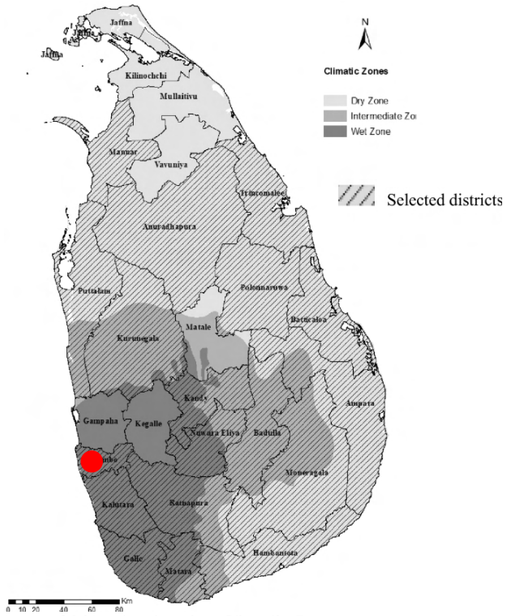
Today, the ***colonial city forms the backbone of Colombo's urban identity, anchoring contemporary development*** and demonstrating how inherited urban frameworks can support long-term growth and transformation.



Colombo: Urban Condition

High density and tropical heat define the contemporary urban condition of Colombo

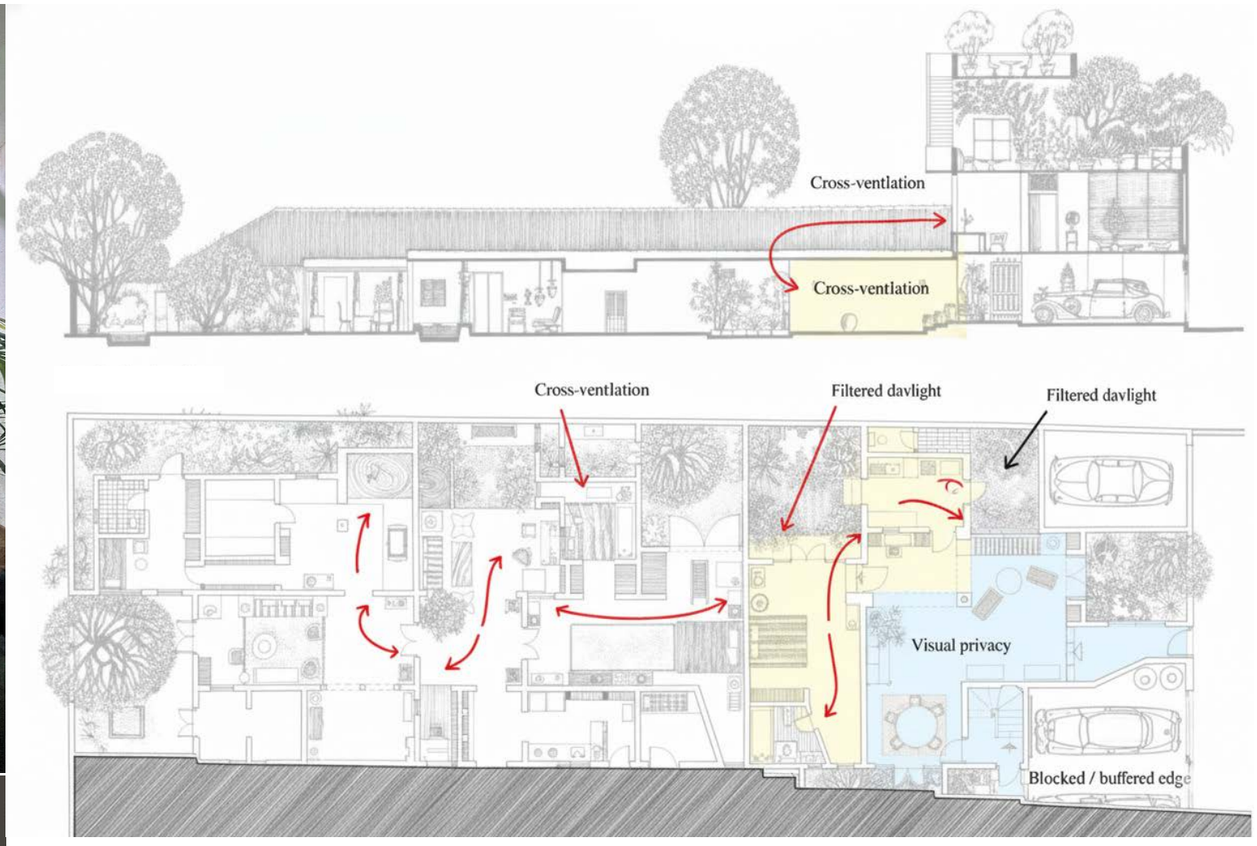
Zone: Torrid Zone, Tropical Wet Climate



Map of Sri Lanka showing Climatic Zones

Colombo: Inward Response

Courtyard as Climatic Core



House No. 11 Plan and Section

Dense urban living in Colombo has produced architectural responses that prioritize inwardness while remaining climatically breathable. Residential environments such as **House No. 11 and De Saram House** demonstrate how cultural expectations of privacy and family life combine with tropical climatic demands to shape spatial form. Instead of outward-facing façades, these houses organize themselves around internal courtyards that function as climatic regulators, allowing cross-ventilation, filtered daylight, and evaporative cooling while maintaining visual separation from the street. Layered enclosures, verandahs, and shaded corridors mediate between interior and exterior, responding to heat and monsoon rainfall through gradual transitions rather than abrupt boundaries.

Inward-facing courtyards regulate ventilation, light, and privacy in dense urban conditions

COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE

ORDER AND ADAPTATION

Here, I felt the architecture guiding me: through shaded verandas, formal courtyards, and streets that imposed order yet softened under the climate.

GALLE FORT

What: Colonial-era fortification with streets, bastions, and public squares

When: Built by the Portuguese in 1588; expanded by the Dutch in the 17th century

Location: Southern coast, Galle

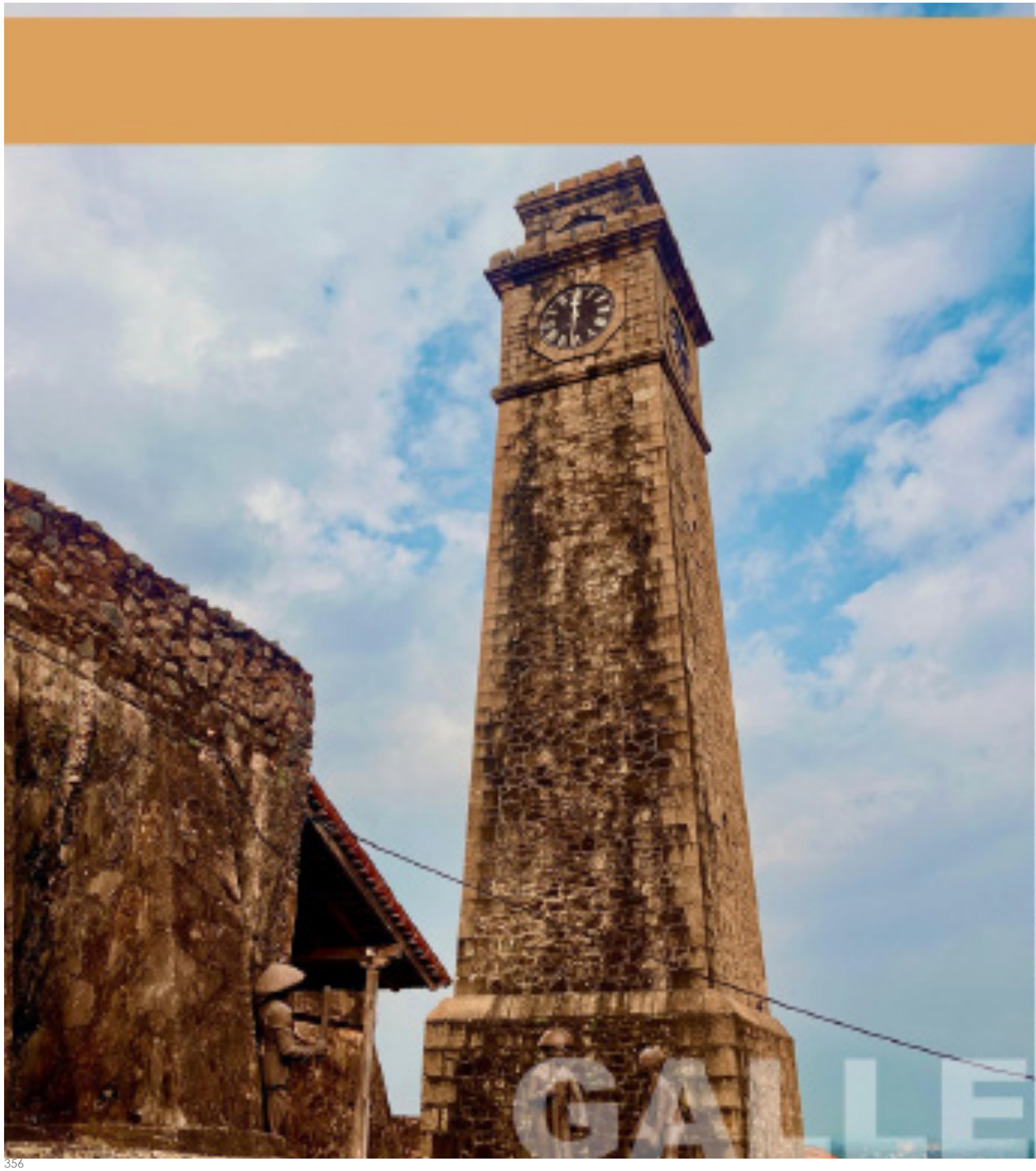
DE SARAM HOUSE

What: Private residence designed in the tropical modernist style, showing colonial architectural influences

When: Built in 1950s–1960s (Bawa project)

Location: Colombo

GALLE: HERITAGE AS DAILY LIFE



Galle developed as a **strategic port city shaped by maritime trade and colonial control.** Its most defining layer, Galle Fort, was consolidated under Dutch rule in the 17th century as a fortified settlement designed to respond to coastal conditions, defense needs, and tropical climate. The fort was planned as a compact, self-contained urban unit, with thick ramparts, bastions, a rectilinear street grid, and clearly defined public, residential, and administrative zones.

Urbanistically, Galle Fort functions through **clear spatial order.** The fortified edge creates a strong boundary, while internal streets remain narrow, walkable, and human-scaled. Blocks are organised around courtyards, ensuring ventilation, daylight, and privacy.

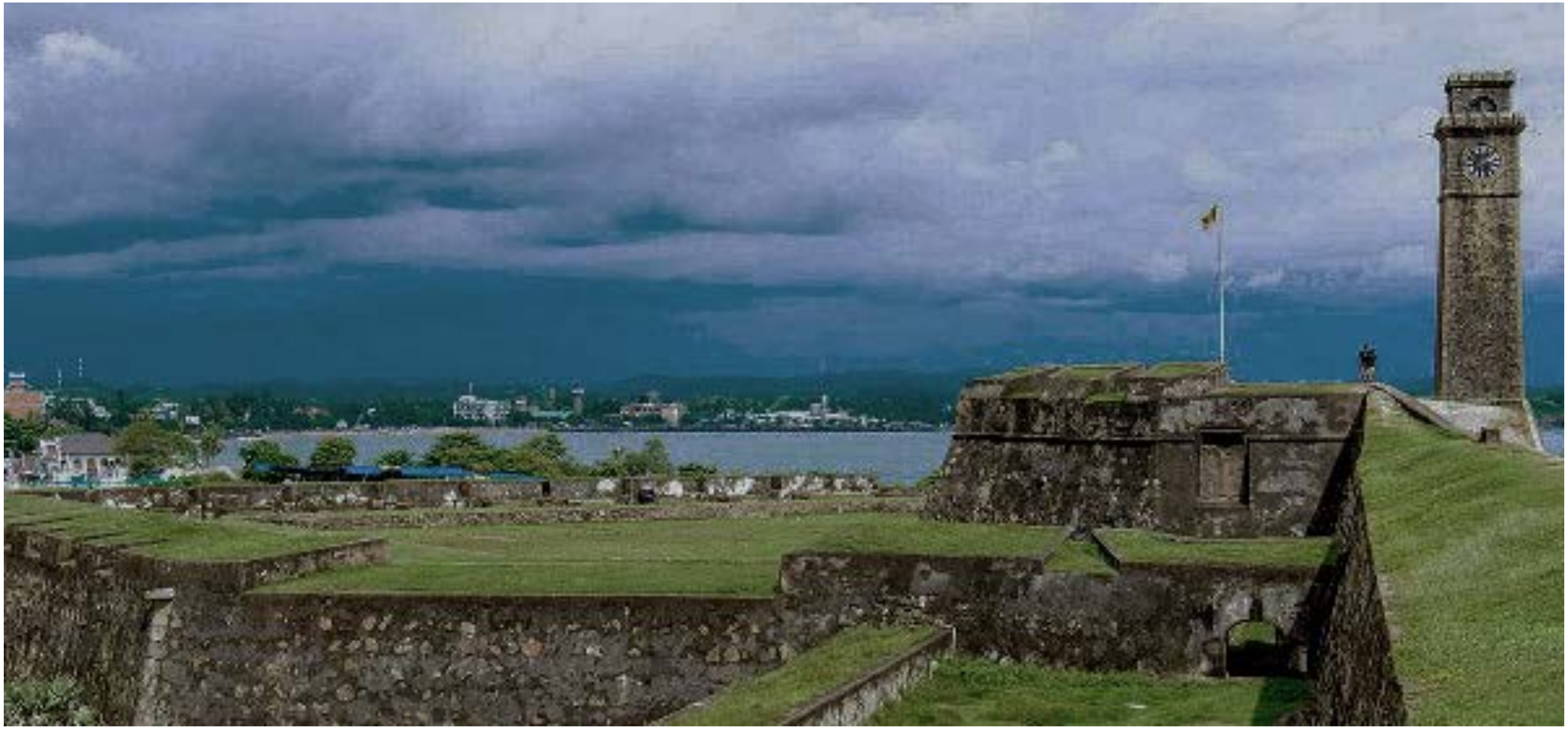
Architecturally, buildings combine **European typologies with local adaptations.** Thick masonry walls, timber roofs, verandahs, and inner courts respond to heat, humidity, and monsoon rains. Over time, these structures have been adaptively reused, housing homes, boutique hotels, cafés, offices, and cultural spaces.

Galle is significant in Sri Lankan architecture because it demonstrates how ***heritage, urban form, and daily life can coexist.*** It offers a working model of conservation through use, where historic fabric supports contemporary needs without losing spatial clarity or identity. As a living urban system, Galle stands as one of Sri Lanka's most successful examples of resilient, climate-responsive, and people-centered historic urbanism.

GALLE: HERITAGE AS DAILY LIFE

Galle is a city where old buildings are part of everyday life. Inside the fort, streets are walkable and used daily by residents, shop owners, and visitors. Buildings are not frozen in time—they are repaired, reused, and adapted for homes, cafés, offices, and small businesses.

The fort walls protect the city and also act as public spaces where people walk, meet, and enjoy views of the sea. The compact layout and thick walls help the city stay comfortable in a hot, coastal climate. Galle shows how historic places can stay alive by being used, not just preserved.

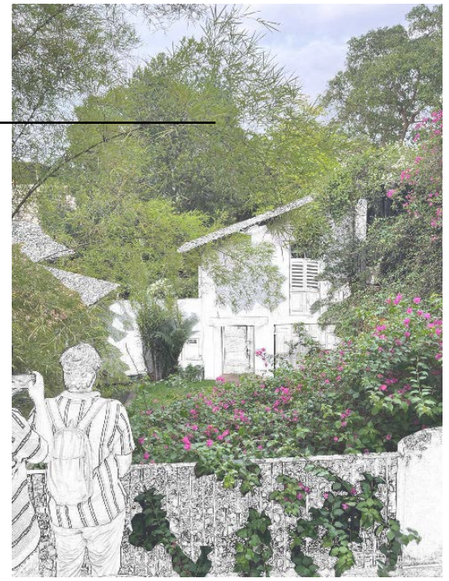


Constructed by the Portuguese in the 16th century and expanded by the Dutch, the Galle Fort is a living relic of colonial planning.

The massive fort walls, bastions, and gateways define interior courtyards and streets while simultaneously opening onto the surrounding landscape and ocean. Walking along the streets, I realized that even in these highly controlled fortifications, the outside world plays a role in shaping how interior spaces are experienced. The built forms are strong and defensive, yet they choreograph movement and provide sequences of interior and exterior experiences.

GALLE FORT

The house nestled in lush garden vegetation



Walking through De Saram House, the first thing that struck me was how the building sits gently within its lush vegetation. Trees and plants almost embrace the house, softening its edges and creating a sense of being enveloped by the landscape. The house doesn't dominate; it coexists with the garden around it.

Integration with vegetation

Windows open and can be perceived as doors as well.

One of my favorite moments was by the fish pond. The windows beside it open fully, dissolving the barrier between indoors and outdoors. Standing there, I could feel the water's reflection, the breeze, and the sounds of the garden as part of the interior experience.

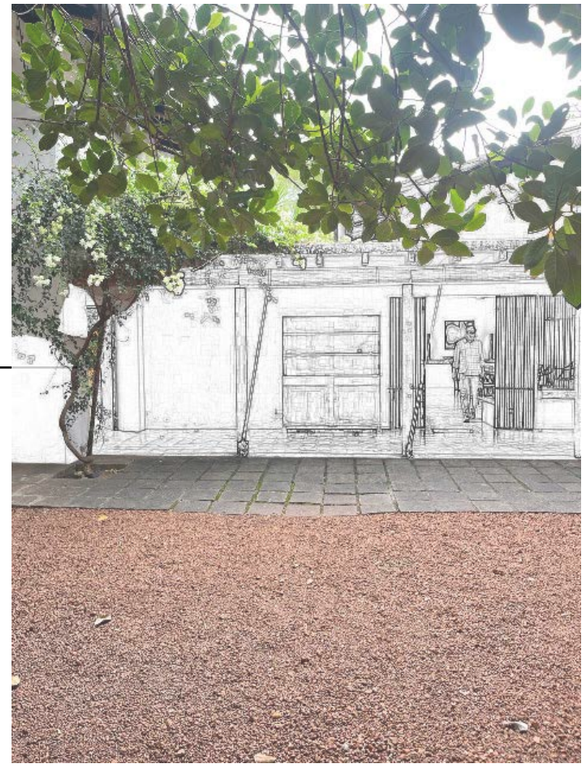
FISH POND AND WINDOWS

Semi-open spaces throughout the house amplify this connection. Verandahs, breezeways, and partially enclosed terraces constantly shift the boundary between interior and exterior. Walking through these areas, it felt like the house breathes with its surroundings, and every pause or turn offers a new perspective on how inside and outside merge.

SEMI-OPEN SPACES

Dining area feels connected to landscape

Trees punctuate courtyards, bringing nature inside.



Interior and exterior merge through central courtyard.

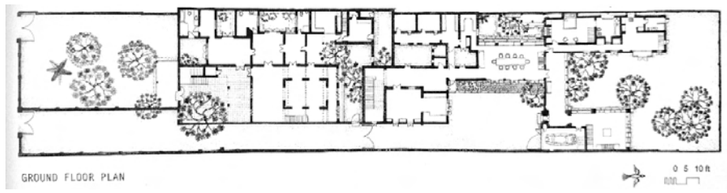
Courtyards

De Saram House, designed by Geoffrey Bawa, is not a colonial-era building, but it shows clear colonial influence.

Moving through the house, I felt the same careful orchestration of light, shade, and ventilation I had observed in colonial buildings. Privacy and openness are balanced through depth and sequence rather than walls alone. The verandah acts as both a climatic buffer and a primary living space, connecting occupants continuously with the garden.

Bawa's colonial-influenced projects reinterpret spatial principles to mediate climate, privacy, and landscape. In all cases, interiority is never fully self-contained - it is activated by the surrounding environment, thresholds, and sequences of movement.

DE SARAM HOUSE



De Saram House by Geoffrey Bawa

Unlike the labyrinthine sprawl of No. 11 (to be discussed later), movement in De Saram House is anchored by a central, rectangular courtyard that the building wraps around on three sides. This U-shaped configuration forces a circumambulatory movement, where one is constantly circling around the courtyard. " Upon entry, the eye is immediately drawn to a small pond within the courtyard. As you navigate the three wings of the building, the plan ensures that you are never disconnected from this central core. The

SACRED MODERN ARCHITECTURE

THE SACRED IN LAYERED MOTION

Movement, layering, and openness guided my experience, with the outside always flowing in.

GANGARAMAYA

What: Layered temple complex with courtyards, corridors, and open-air paths blending tradition with urban context.
When: 19th–20th century expansions.
Location: Colombo, near Beira Lake.

SEEMA MALAKA

What: Floating meditation platforms and pavilions on Beira Lake; emphasis on water, light, and openness.
When: Rebuilt by Geoffrey Bawa, 1970s.
Location: Beira Lake, Colombo.

Ritual Micro-Climate

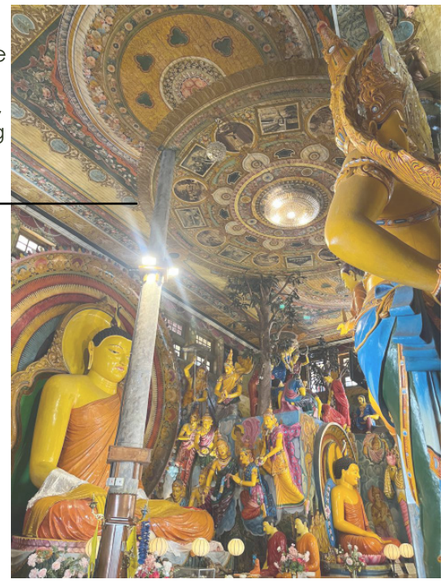
Water as Cooling

Religious complexes such as **Seema Malaka Temple and Gangaramaya Temple** further reveal how culture and climate shape spatial experience within a dense urban fabric. Water bodies surrounding Seema Malaka act as both symbolic and climatic elements, cooling the air and creating a psychological buffer from the surrounding city. At Gangaramaya, a sequence of thresholds courtyards, covered walkways, and semi-open halls allows ritual practices to unfold while offering shade, ventilation, and protection from rain. Built form here is not monumental in scale but layered and incremental, reflecting religious practices that value movement, pause, and enclosure.

Water creates a climatic and psychological buffer from the city.
Ritual movement unfolds through shaded thresholds and semi-open halls.

As Density Dissolves, Landscape Begins to Shape Space

Patterns blur the line between floor, walls, and ceiling



The interior felt overwhelming with its dense layers of shrines, statues, and offerings. Every corner is visually rich, almost chaotic, pulling my attention in multiple directions at once. I felt both fascinated and slightly disoriented, as though the temple is alive and constantly shifting around me. The cluttered density creates a sense of sacred energy but also challenges the mind's ability to settle.

OUTSIDE LEAKING IN

Amidst the visual richness, small courtyards and open passages provided rare breathing spaces. Here, the play of light and shadow, the movement of air, and glimpses of greenery offered moments of calm. These pauses felt almost intentional, like the architecture was inviting me to stop and reflect, breaking the intensity of the interior.

LAYERED CHAOS

Even when inside, the exterior never stops intruding. Open walls, courtyards, and glimpses of the city remind me that the temple is not a sealed sanctuary. This permeability felt liberating.

MOMENTS OF RELIEF

Crossing over to the floating platforms of Seema Malaka, I felt completely suspended between land and water. The lake stretched the perception of the temple, and by utilising the buildings reflection dissolved boundaries and allowed the built to appear as if it were floating within the natural environment. The space felt almost fragile, as if its experience depended entirely on the careful interaction of movement, water, and light, and that without this interaction, it risked becoming purely visual rather than spatial.

COURTYARDS

Experiencing Gangaramaya and Seema Malaka together revealed how modern sacred architecture in Sri Lanka negotiates density, openness, and urban context. Gangaramaya's layered interiors contrast sharply with Seema Malaka's minimal, floating platforms, yet both rely on movement and thresholds to define interiority. I noticed that in this modern approach, sacred spaces can feel cluttered or precarious, and the balance between built and unbuilt becomes more deliberate but also more fragile. Unlike ancient sites, where openness and ritual unfold naturally, modern religious architecture asks for careful navigation and attention to fully experience the sacred. It made me realize that interior meaning is never isolated; it emerges from light, water, air, and circulation, forming sacredness in the spaces between.

GANGARAMAYA AND SEEMA MALAKA

TROPICAL MORDERNISM

PIONEERED BY GEOFFERY BAWA

Moving beyond Sri Lanka's colonial history, the ***architectural narrative shifts towards Tropical Modernism***, a design approach pioneered by **Geoffrey Bawa**. This movement reinterpreted modern architecture through the lens of local climate, landscape, and culture, rejecting imported styles that ignored context.

A defining characteristic of this style is the blurring of boundaries between inside and outside. Walls dissolve into screens, roofs extend into gardens, and vegetation becomes part of the architectural experience. Landscape is not treated as decoration but as an essential design element that shapes movement, views, and microclimate.

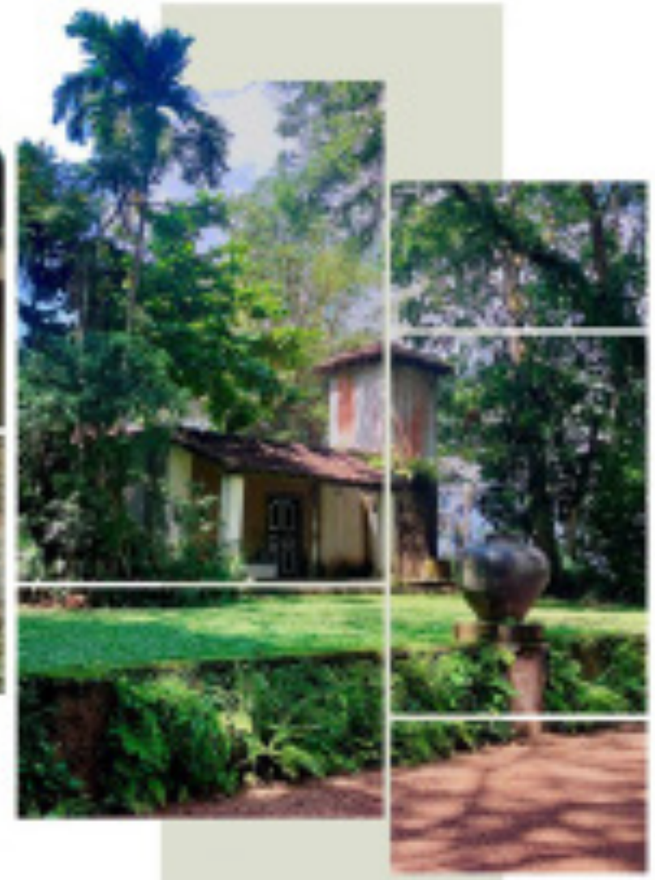
This approach is uniquely Sri Lankan because it draws from local traditions of living—open, adaptable, and closely connected to nature—while using modern materials and construction techniques. Tropical Modernism thus establishes a modern architectural identity rooted in place, proving that modernity in Sri Lanka emerges not by replacing tradition, but by evolving through it.

COEXISTENCE THROUGH DESIGN: GEOFFREY BAWA'S KEY WORKS

The works of Geoffrey Bawa exemplify how Tropical Modernism in Sri Lanka is fundamentally about coexistence—between architecture and landscape, built form and climate, public function and natural systems. Rather than creating isolated architectural objects, Bawa's projects emerge from their sites, allowing nature to remain dominant.

At ***Heritance Kandalama***, the building is embedded into the hillside, following existing contours and vegetation. Architecture dissolves into the forest through layered terraces, shaded corridors, and continuous visual connections to the landscape. The hotel does not sit on the site: it becomes part of it, minimizing visual and ecological impact

The ***Parliament of Sri Lanka*** demonstrates coexistence at an institutional scale. Set within a man-made lake, the building is defined by horizontality, reflection, and controlled monumentality. Water, landscape, and built form work together to create a civic presence that is symbolic yet restrained, reinforcing democracy through spatial openness rather than dominance.



At ***Lunuganga Estate***, architecture recedes almost entirely. The project is a landscape composed through movement, framed views, and subtle architectural interventions. Built elements act as markers within the terrain, emphasizing sequence and experience over form.

NEGOTIATING NATURE AND ARCHITECTURE

Bawa's architecture dissolves boundaries between inside and outside, creating spaces where built and unbuilt coexist in a fluid dialogue.

LUNUGANGA

What: Geoffrey Bawa's personal estate and experimental architecture laboratory

When: From 1948 onward

Location: Bentota

HOUSE NO. 11

What: Urban residence

When: 1960s

Location: Colombo

PARLIAMENT HOUSE

What: National legislative complex

When: Completed in 1982

Location: Western Province

JETWING LIGHTHOUSE

What: Coastal hotel

When: 1997

Location: Galle

Small pavilions, steps, and even a chicken coop felt like deliberate experiments rather than polished outcomes. Observing these, I felt I was witnessing the architect thinking in real time, testing ideas that would later evolve into monumental works. There's honesty here that later, more refined projects sometimes don't have.

EXPERIMENTS IN FORM

Despite the apparent freedom, views are carefully composed. I noticed how each opening, each frame of the landscape, directs my attention.
The tension between control and openness fascinated me: the estate feels spontaneous but is meticulously curated.

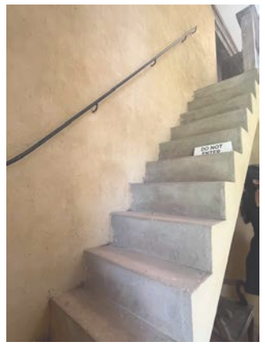
Each turn revealed a new view, a different relationship between building and landscape, and I realized that the journey mattered as much as any single structure.

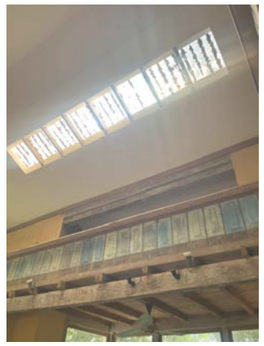
MOVEMENT AS DISCOVERY

The gardens functioned like interior spaces without walls, their boundaries soft and negotiable. I could move freely, pause, or sit and reflect, and the sense of interiority emerged through vegetation, terraces, and light rather than confinement. It felt as if the landscape itself was hosting the architecture.

TERRACED GARDENS

OPENNESS IN CONTROL





Surfaces, materials, and unfinished edges reveal the process of making. I found the rawness compelling; it exposes trial, adjustment, and intention, allowing me to connect with Bawa's thought process more directly than in his later, polished works.

RAW MATERIALITY

Visiting Lunuganga felt less like stepping into a finished architectural project and more like wandering through a living laboratory of ideas. From the moment I entered, I sensed a rawness that set it apart from the elegance of Bawa's later works: a place where the process of making is exposed, not hidden.

Paths meander, terraces shift in level, and views open and close just as suddenly, creating a constant interplay between interiority and landscape.

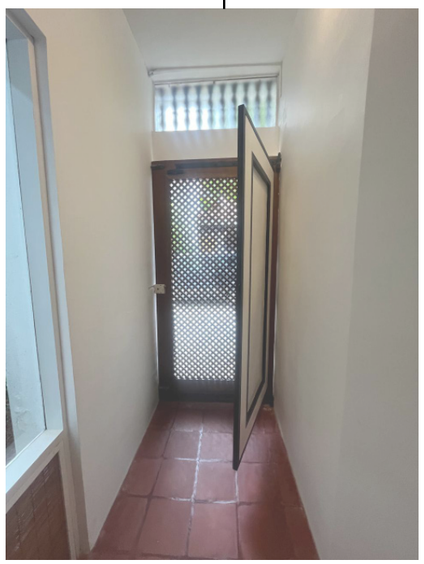
Gardens act as rooms, yet their boundaries are often ambiguous; the architecture never dominates, but frames and engages with the natural world around it.

Small pavilions, steps, and even a humble chicken coop felt like experiments in form and spatial sequence, prototypes that would later inform monumental works such as the Parliament complex.

There is an honesty here I found compelling: nothing is overly polished, nothing pretends to be fully resolved, and there is tension between openness and control. Views are deliberately framed, sequences subtly directed, but the estate never feels rigid or forced. I found this rawness more engaging than later refinement, as it reveals the thinking behind the architecture, the dialogue between experimentation and intention, and the constant negotiation between structure and landscape.

Courtyards

Doors and windows designed to enhance the connection with the unbuilt



RAW MATERIALITY

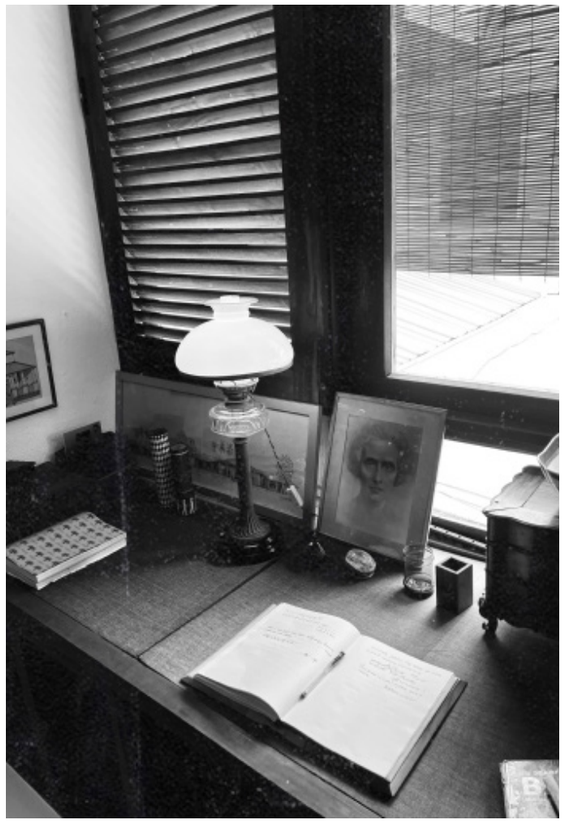
Visiting House No. 11 felt like experiencing an architectural workbook of interior–exterior relationships, where every move through the house was a negotiation with light and climate, rather than a simple transition from one enclosed room to another.

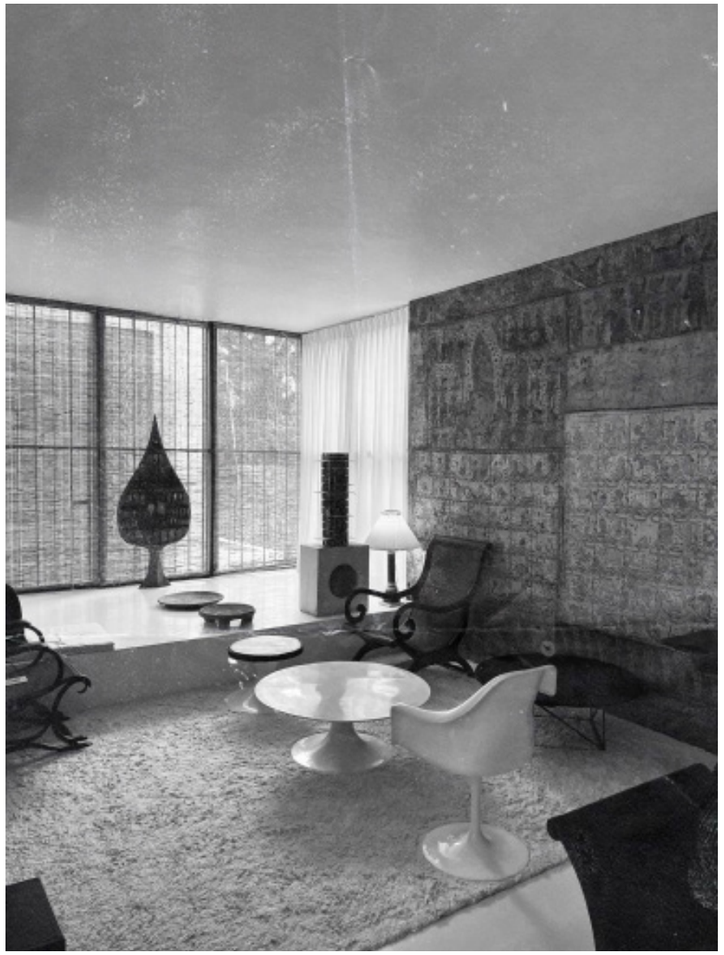
Unlike Lunuganga's expansive gardens, here Bawa translated his tropical modernism into the dense urban fabric of Colombo, using courtyards, open-to-sky voids, layered thresholds, and framed vistas to pull the unbuilt deep into the heart of the home.

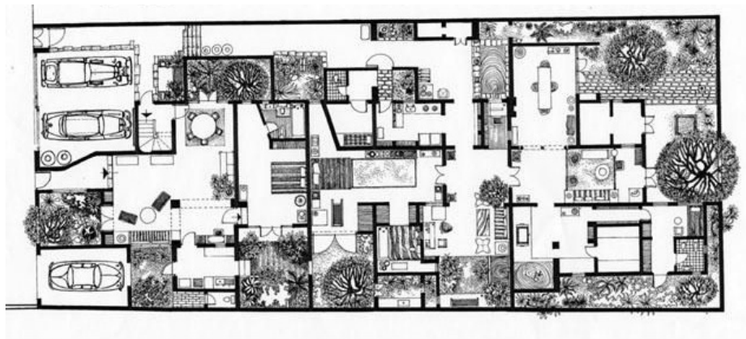
What struck me most was how movement through the house is never straightforward; corridors bend, levels subtly shift, and thresholds: from glass-paned doors to wooden screens and verandas, constantly calibrate awareness between inside and outside. Courtyards are not an afterthought but spatial anchors around which life circulates; creating microclimates that dissolve the boundary between built and unbuilt. Rooms open onto these courts through wide openings or narrow portals, and views are framed, so that a glimpse of sky or foliage becomes part of the room's identity rather than a backdrop.

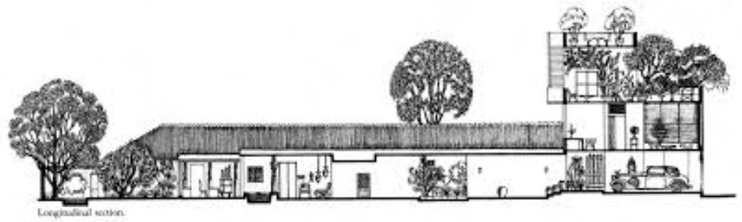
Even simple details, such as louvered wooden screens, strategically placed openings, and transitions from shaded interior to bright exterior makes sure that the house never fully detaches from the outside world, even in its introverted character.

The unbuilt is choreographed into the sequence of living spaces, breathing life into interiors that would otherwise feel enclosed or static. In House No. 11, interior space becomes meaningful by the constant dialogue with light, air, vegetation, and motion.









Longitudinal section.

The Movement of Discovery: Bawa's Residential Work

Contrast the movement in ancient architecture with House No. 11. Here, movement becomes cinematic. By discarding a primary datum or central axis, Bawa creates a labyrinth where the visitor is invited to wander rather than follow. Although the walls largely maintain a 90 degrees grid, the experience is organic because of the movement. The space is heavily decorated but it doesn't feel overcrowded. The "eye is always captivated" by curated vistas. Each and every space is interconnected like a spiderweb. There are always multiple options for one to navigate. The transition between the "outside bleeding in" through skylights and courtyards creates a seamless flow. In these spaces, movement is an act of individual freedom.

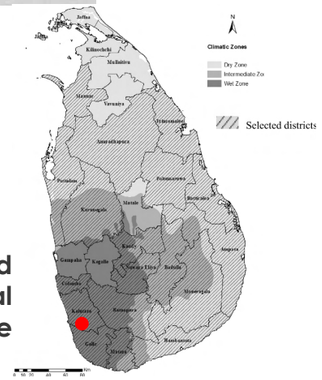
Visiting Parliament House made me aware of how Bawa scales his tropical modernism for civic architecture. The building sits within a vast lake, immediately dissolving the boundary between land and water. Approaching the complex, I moved across bridges and terraces, feeling a constant negotiation between outside and inside. Inside, expansive openings, verandas, and layered roof planes bring light, air, and reflections of water deep into the interior. Circulation is carefully choreographed, with thresholds, openings, and pauses shaping the experience.

Costal Sri Lanka

Along Sri Lanka's southern coast, architecture demonstrates a relaxed openness shaped by climate and lifestyle. At **Lunuganga and Brief Garden**, spatial organization is guided by landscape rather than built enclosure, with gardens functioning as a sequence of outdoor rooms that respond to light, breeze, and terrain. At **Jetwing Lighthouse**, open plans, deep verandahs, and shaded edges allow buildings to remain permeable, reducing dependence on enclosure in a humid coastal climate.

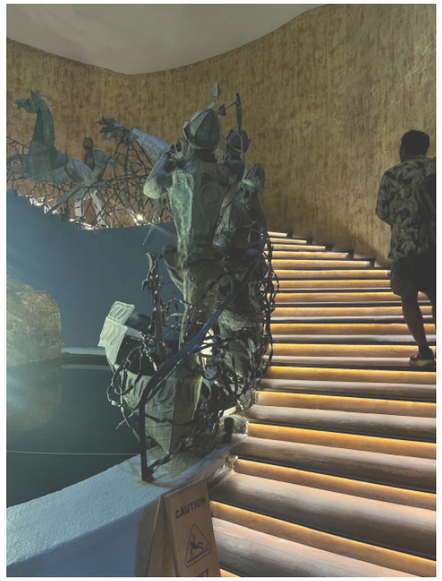
The continuity between interior and exterior reflects a cultural comfort with outdoor living, where daily activities extend into gardens, terraces, and shaded transitional spaces. Here, landscape is not treated as a backdrop but becomes an extension of architecture itself, shaping movement, pause, and experience. Coastal architecture thus embraces climate as a design asset, allowing form to remain light, adaptive, and informal.

Zone: Torrid Zone, Tropical Wet Climate



Map of Sri Lanka showing Climatic Zones

Porosity and indoor–outdoor continuity respond to humidity and breeze



The spiral staircase became my passage from enclosed arrival to expansive ocean engagement. It was a surprise to move from this seemingly tight space into the open dining area.

MOVEMENT DRAWN OUTWARD

Pools and open courtyards link spaces here. Walking through them, I felt the edges blur, the built adding to the landscape rather than containing it and the water guiding movement more than walls.

SPACE IN CONSTANT FLUX

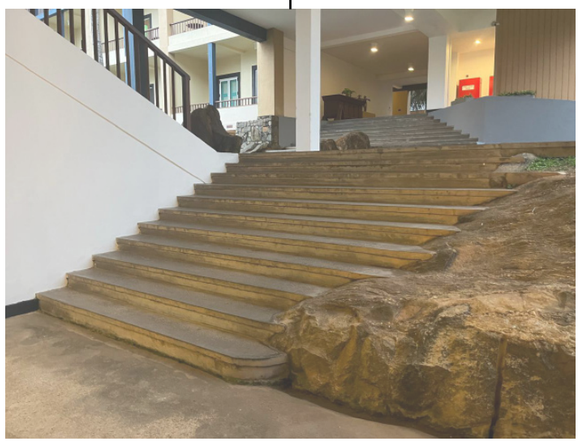
In shaded lounges open to the coast, the sea became part of the interior program. Sound, and breezefelt essential to how the space was meant to be lived and perceived.

SEA AS THE INTERIOR

From enclosed to semi-open to open

The rock breaking through the steps immediately caught my attention, forcing me to pause and adjust my movement. It felt like a deliberate interruption, a moment where the natural landscape enters the architecture.

A fragment of the unbuilt pierces through the built



Bawa didn't flatten the land; he let rock outcrops intrude into steps and corridors. It made me feel that the architecture was listening to the site, letting the natural form shape the sequence of spaces.

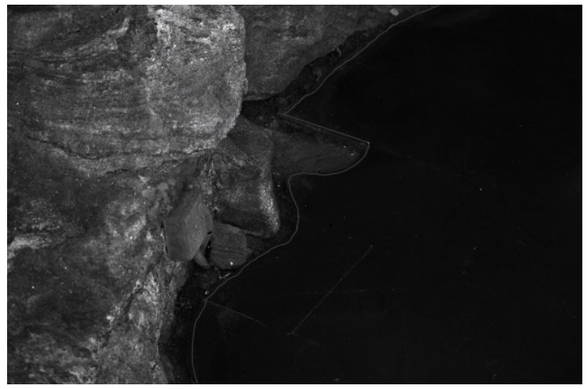
ROCK FORMATION - NATURE EMBRACED

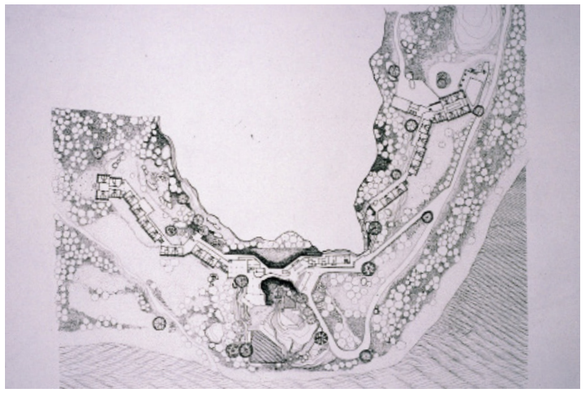
Views through arches, verandas, and shaded openings acted like frames, each one a moment of passage between inside and outside. I became conscious of every shift in light, temperature, and sound as I moved.

SEA AS THE INTERIOR

Visiting Jetwing Lighthouse felt like moving through a sequence of moments carefully choreographed between building, landscape, and ocean. Perched on the rocky headland above the Indian Ocean, the hotel never felt separate from its site. Walking from the stone-faced entrance into the entry plaza, I found myself drawn along the spiral staircase, and my gaze naturally drifted toward the sea. Inside the public areas, verandas, terraces, courtyards, and pools kept opening up to the horizon, letting wind, sunlight, and the sound of breakers flow deep into the architecture. The natural rock formations were not hidden; steps and corridors worked around them, making the building feel like it had grown from the land rather than imposed upon it. Moving through the hotel, I became acutely aware of how the interior and exterior are always in dialogue. Every corridor, terrace, and framed view turned circulation into a continuous negotiation with light, air, and landscape. The hotel didn't feel enclosed; instead, thresholds, framed vistas, and open spaces make the unbuilt as important as the walls themselves, shaping how the space is experienced and remembered.

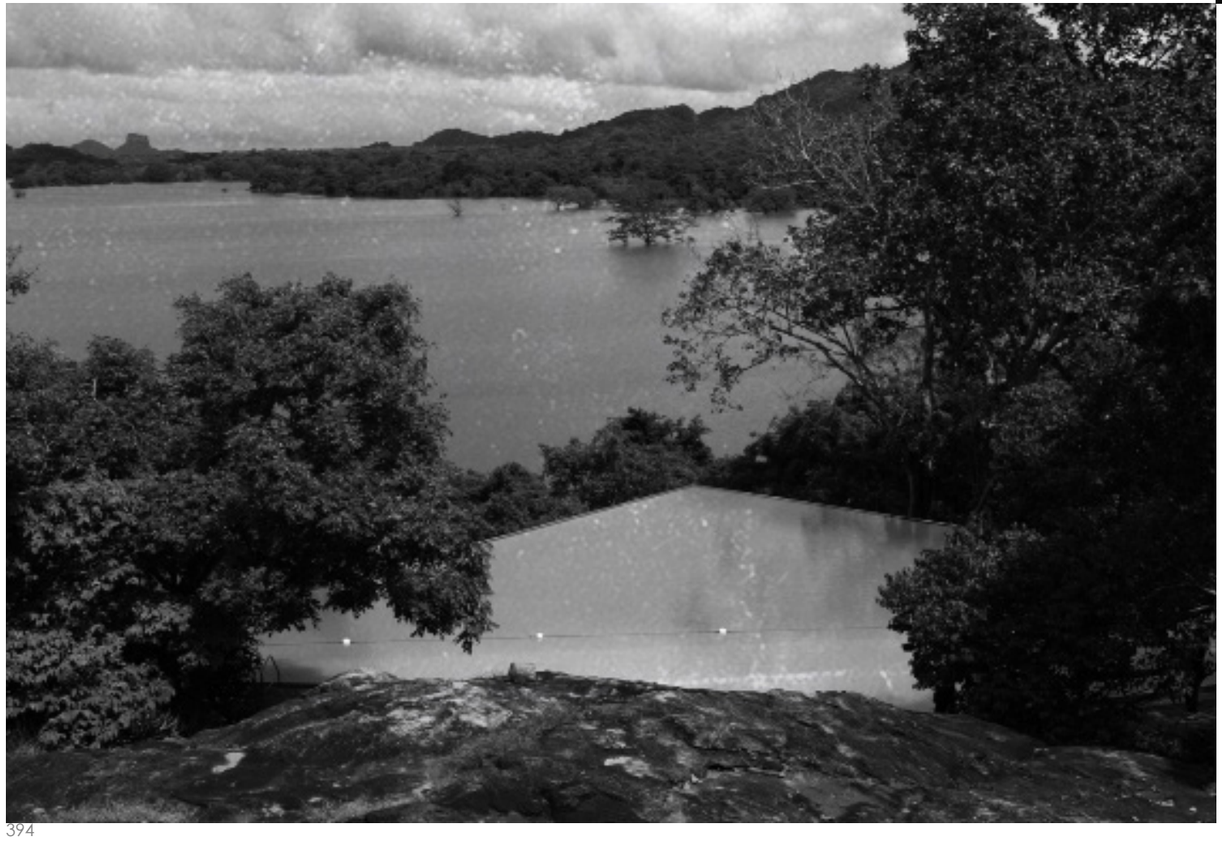
At Heritance Kandalama, Bawa treats the cliff not as an obstacle, but as an active participant in the design. This is most evident in the physical junctions where the building meets the "living rock": glass and steel frames are meticulously cut to match the jagged silhouette of the stone, tiles are hand-trimmed to flow around the rock's protrusions, railing heights vary instinctively to accommodate the rising stone. Even the Kaludiya Pool subverts the traditional "tiled box" by allowing the dark, natural rock to emerge from its depths. By refusing to flatten or "tame" the site, Bawa ensures that the visitor is constantly aware of the ancient terrain, turning a simple walk down a corridor into a tactile experience of the mountain itself..

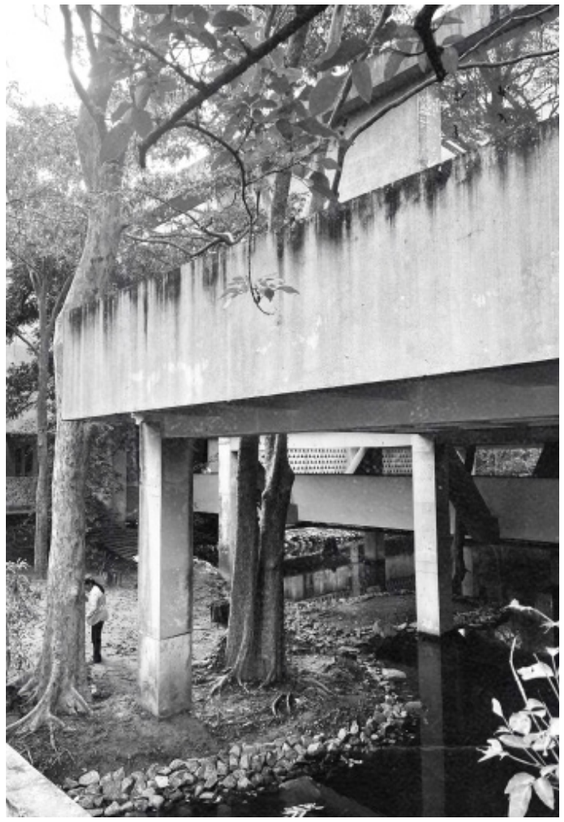




The Movement of Integration: The Hotel Projects

At Heritance Kandalama and Jetwing Lighthouse, movement shifts to Linear Integration. The layouts wrap around the natural features; the cliff or the coast rather than imposing a grid upon them. Movement follows the "hug" of the building against the landscape, much like the winding paths of the Sigiriya Boulder Gardens. The architecture becomes a secondary frame for the environment. as you move through the linear corridors, you are not just traversing a building, but experiencing the "reclaiming" power of nature itself.





CONTEMPORARY TROPICAL MODERNISM

REINTERPRETING TROPICAL SPACES

Contemporary architects build on Bawa's legacy, experimenting with openness, climate responsiveness, and fluid interior - exterior connections in a modern context.

During our time in Bentota and Ganemulla, Vijitha Basnayaka's work revealed a consistent approach to interior - exterior continuity. At Dunes Hotel, the shaded circulation spaces remain open to light, air, and greenery, allowing movement to unfold through a series of thresholds rather than enclosed corridors. The building responds to climate through deep overhangs and semi-open spaces that blur the line between inside and outside. In his house, the courtyard pulls vegetation and light into the heart of the house, ensuring that even interior rooms remain connected to the exterior.

Rather than separation, the architecture relies on layering and permeability, reinforcing the idea that interior space here is defined by its relationship to what lies outside.

VIJITHA BASNAYAKA HOUSE

What: Private residence

When: Early 21st century

Location: Western Province

DUNES HOTEL

What: Coastal hotel

When: Early 21st century

Location: Unawatuna, Southern Province

Across scales and time, Sri Lankan architecture demonstrates how culture and climate generate spatial form rather than constrain it.

Coexistence
As An Urban Strategy

Coexistence in Sri Lanka is neither occidental nor nostalgic. It is a design logic rooted in **landscape, adaptability, and incremental growth.** Architecture across eras survives because it is embedded within stable natural frameworks and flexible spatial systems.

Srilanka - where **nature, tradition, colonial heritage, modern infrastructure, and Tropical Modernism exist side by side**.

This layered condition transforms **architecture from a sequence of isolated objects into a continuous, living urban fabric, where past, present, and future remain in dialogue**.

Together, these layers show that Sri Lanka's cities evolve through **continuity and adaptation**. Coexistence becomes an ***intentional urban and architectural strategy***—where past, present, and future function simultaneously to create resilient and meaningful urban environments.

CO-EXISTENCE, MOVEMENT, AND THRESHOLDS

05

A JOURNEY THROUGH SPACE

Group 5
UIR22122, UAR23015, UAR23047, UAR23214

Someone once correctly said, “It’s the journey that counts, not the destination “. Architecture isn’t just seen, it’s felt. And there’s no better way to experience it than to move through it. Each element, each decision and each thought comes alive when one moves through space and feels its essence. Making circulation a quality through space is, movement ; unique to each one. One decides the journey they make through space, and there are abundant ways to make that said journey. The narrative here lies within the various factors that guide ones’ circulation through space and how that movement is unique and memorable to each.

POROUS TRANSITIONS

Muskaan Varma | UIR22122

Spaces tell stories, stories tell intent and intent tells thought. This SWS was a journey through stories of Sri Lankan architecture. One experiences built form through the various elements that make up space. Navigating through each pause, anchor and element defines the journey that one makes within a space. This booklet follows stories told through the various elements in built form, be it fenestration, walkways, courtyards or gardens, and how each of these change experiences while navgating through space. The stories also tell how light creates a direct impact on the journey and pereception of a space.

05a

Geoffrey Bawa

01

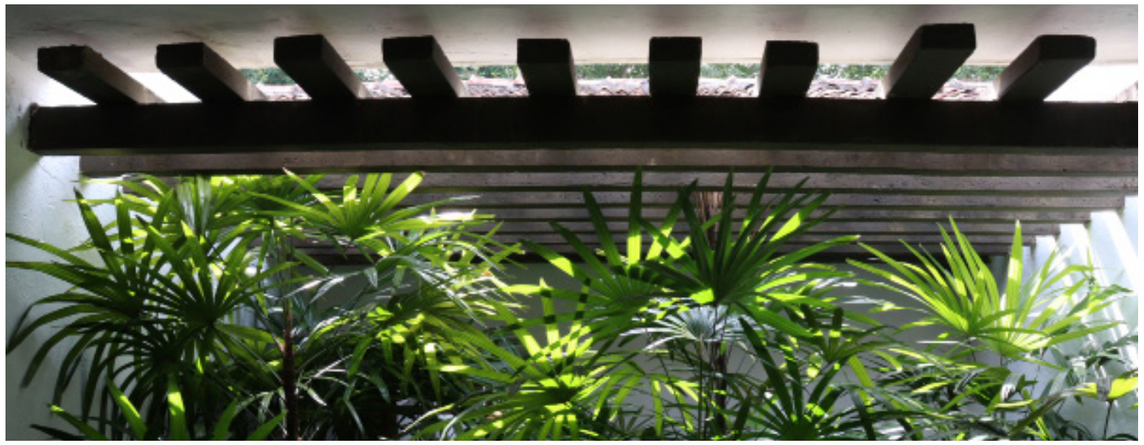
For Geoffrey Bawa, a building wasn't just a place to sit; it was a journey to be walked. He designed spaces like a storyteller, using circulation to lead you on a chase between shadow and light. You don't just walk down his hallways; you "leak" from an indoor room into an outdoor garden, often guided by a rhythmic row of columns or a floor that changes texture under your feet. He loved to keep you guessing—narrowing a corridor to make you feel cozy, then suddenly opening a wall to a massive, framed view of the jungle that takes your breath away. By forcing you to turn corners or walk around a preserved boulder, Bawa ensures you aren't just moving through a building, but dancing with the landscape itself.

House No II

Movement through House 11 is layered. A journey unfolds itself through hallways, sudden openings, staircases and courtyards, creating a rhythm of visual surprise.

The entry into house 11 is understated by choice. The narrow sense of circulation in the streets follows itself into the first part of the house, where the light inside is carefully withheld. The atmosphere is decided with the light coming in from the openings and apertures from the top, rather than a typical window on the wall. Such openings define the journey of one's movement within space. They guide feelings and observations. This journey within the house is not directed towards any door, but it follows the *light*. The light seeps in through courtyards and clerestories, and illuminates special anchors of space, such as the entry seating area, the owl and table at one corner of the passage, or a courtyard at the end of the first pathway.

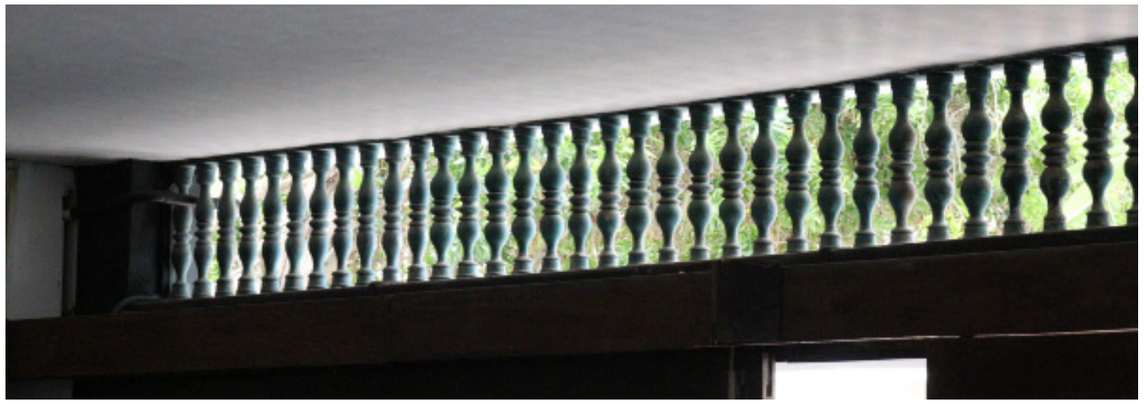
The light coming in from the top shifts the focus of circulation in space, to movement within the interiors with a subtle connection to the outside.



On crossing the first hallway, Bawa tastefully places a pause point with an open top for light to seep in. Taking elements such as Chettinad columns portrays how he uses stories from his own life and travel in his designs. This pause point allows one to reflect upon the design of the house, and reel in the stories it tells.

Post this break, one enters the main living area of the house, through a door to a series of spaces interconnected through large openings, shifting focus from interior movement to overall perception of space. This entryway opens up the tight passageway into big spaces intertwined with nature. The drawing room sits next to an open space for rainfall to create a theatrical visual in the space.

The courtyard adjoining the living room sets a subtle tile drop below the floor level, to keep the rainwater from entering the house. Such decisions really shine light on the depth of Bawa's understanding of functionality in designing spaces. This shift in space form the living room to the courtyard allows one to truly appreciate the design as seen from a frame from the outside, and brings in another anchor point of the house. The living room is lit by the light coming in through this courtyard and hence these two pockets of spaces function as one, when needed, and separately too, on choice. A subtle bifurcation, albeit connected through function and aesthete, transforms one's journey through his house, into a memorable one.



Clerestories

The blue green balusters and wooden lattice screens create a porous fenestration system, introducing light sparingly and indirectly. This screen acts as a layered threshold, veiling the outside world while inviting the breeze and dapple light into the interior. Bringing light from the top allows for it to spread over the space, and diffuse in the interiors, whilst not creating sharp bursts of light.

The seating right under the light suggests it being a social cul-de-sac. This acts as the first pause point in the movement through space, and holds one to stop. Bawa subtly uses the brightness to transform this spot into one for small gatherings, reading or conversing.

Sky Light

The sky light in the corner becomes of utmost importance, as it brings the first source of light in the passageway. It anchors one through their journey within space, and gives a sense of connection to the outside, albeit small, but impactful.

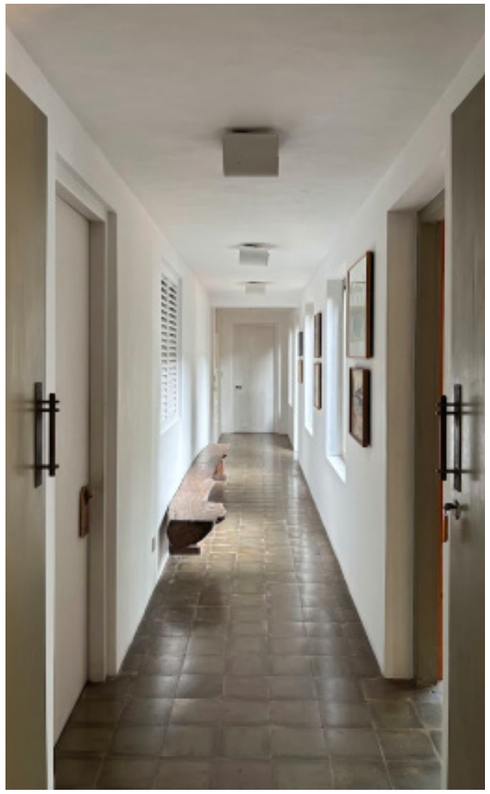
This small opening changes how one perceives space. The aperture, guiding light based on how weather acts outside, sets the tone of the atmosphere inside. Whilst creating a social narrative of a journey through space, it alters the movement through its climate responsive output of light.

De Saram House

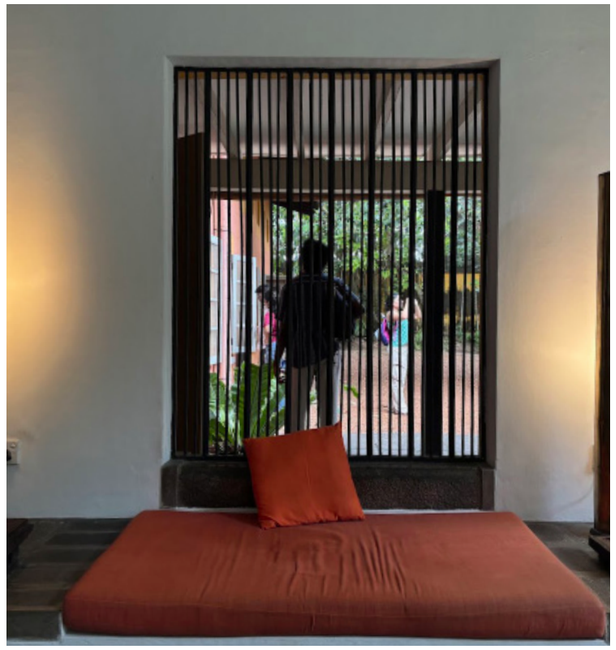
De Saram House by Geoffrey Bawa, stands in it's own league of inventive design. A contrast to his design of House No 11, where circulation and movement is marked through anchor points in architectural elements bringing light in from the top, De Saram House is a porous labyrinth of spaces.

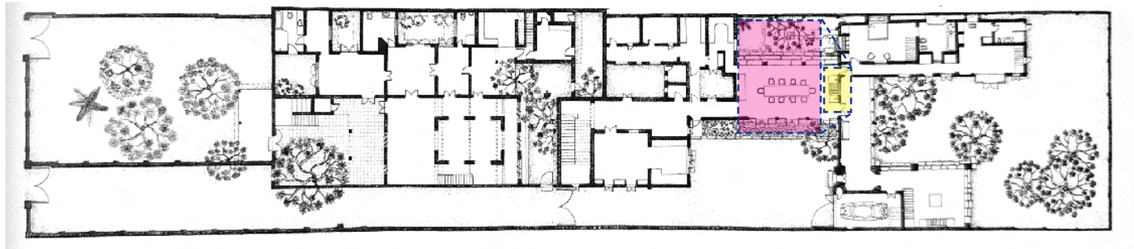
Numerous apertures in the walls allows for constant connection of the outside and the inside. Here movement is guided by what one sees through these apertures, striking curiosity and excitement to find spaces. The dining room wall has multiple windows which serve multiple functions as an entity, letting the user decide the type of journey and feeling they want to experience in the space.

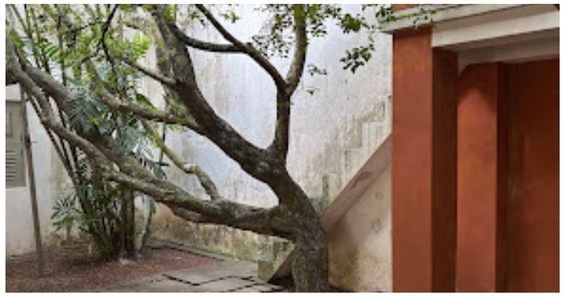
A long hallway for guest bedrooms, although slightly tight, was so beautifully well lit because of Bawa's design intervention to make walls porous. This leads users into a journey along the path, but not closing them in.



Another seating in the dining area with a porous back allowed for better ventilation and light in the room. A subtle seating space bringing in such function, creates a pause point in the space for the user to sit, unwind, reflect and take in the design of the space. This seat provides the view of the dining room, adjoining the open ground on the left and a courtyard with trees and entrance to the room on top, on the right. It becomes a focal point of the space and helps the user decide their journey within the house.

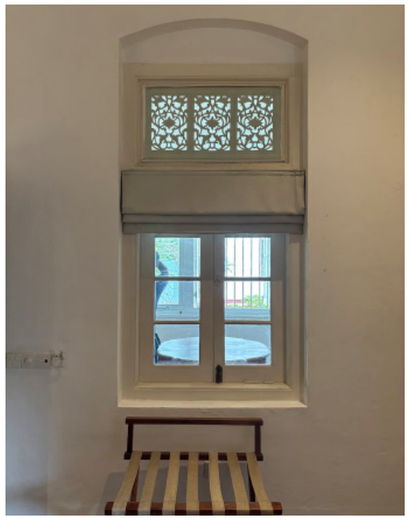






The peripheral part of the window was fixed, and brought in light to illuminate the space. The centre part of the window was openable with louvres, used for ventilation and to get a better bigger frame of the view outside (a connection to be established). And lastly, the bottom part of the window opens up to the fish pond, for maintenance and feeding. This was truly a master class in design; the way he got multiple purposes to function in a single architectural element. This decides how the user interacts with the space, and hence each journey is unique to it's own, deciding the path one takes.

Repetition of this window along the entire draws a very thin line between the outside and the inside. This makes one feel part of the nature, and makes the space seem bigger as it connects to an even bigger entity just outside.

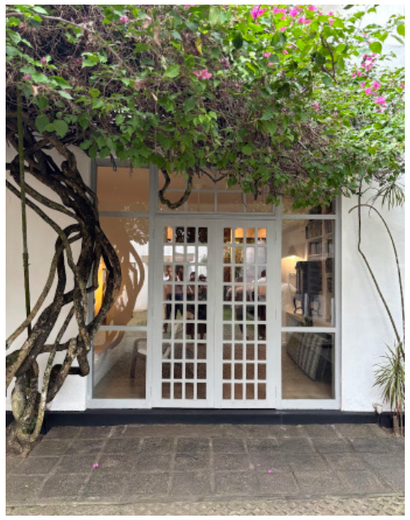


The different kinds of openings in the house make for more investment of person in admiring the design and enhances their journey.

Serving multiple functions yet again; different panes for ventilation, light, openable shutter and privacy, all include Bawa's genius in connection between the outside and the inside.

These architectual elements guide one's journey within space as it defines how light enters each space for a specific function. It decides how the space functions itself.

And as a contrast to Bawa's House No. 11, De Saram House brings in all its light through apertures in walls rather than in ceilings. And hence the atmosphere is more defined by the outside than the inside.



The private piano room that Bawa designed for the residents, also houses apertures for sun light to hit the piano at sunset, creating a theatrical frame for the owner's hobbies. He understood the need of the space.

Heritance Kandalama

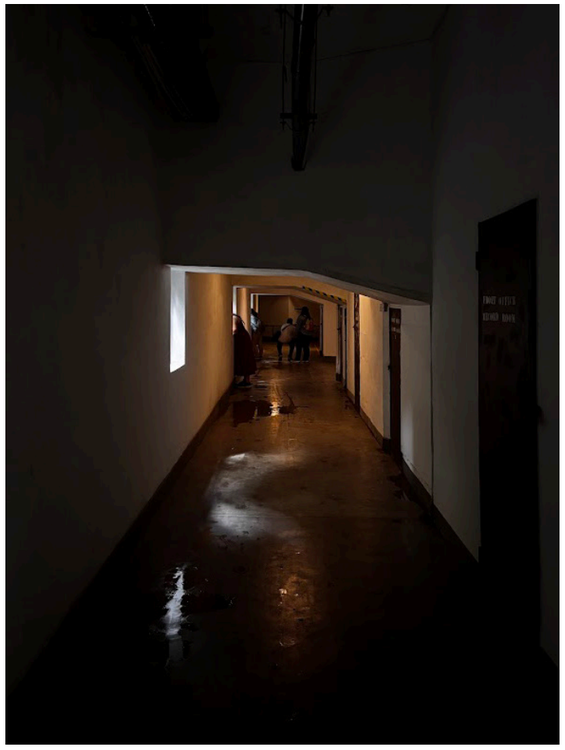
Stepping into Kandalama feels like a choreographed sequence of cinematic reveals. Bawa's expertise in Tropical Modernist architecture truly comes into play in this hotel. He designed this hotel in a way where the story revolves around the guest, a protagonist and the Sri Lankan landscape as its script. The journey is less about reaching a destination and more about a rhythmic pulse between enclosure and infinite space.

Looking in from the outside, the journey begins with mystery and compression. One can only see an almost invisible, shrouded in thick jungle and draped in greenery. One feels the breeze, the sun, yet cool and enclosed. Bawa intentionally designed to restrict the first sight of the hotel, to create suspense going into the large volume that the hotel actually beholds.

As one moves through the tunnel, the space suddenly explodes, entering into an open sided lobby where architecture disappears, but the landscape of Sri Lanka emerges. This hallway leads to a very large open space, ventilated purely by breeze and no centralised air conditioning, making the most of nature's gift. The first pause point in this journey comes to Bawa's design of a staircase landing, large enough for his table to be placed at. This space sits between the landscape; a solid rock wall on one side, and an entire frame looking over the Kandalama Tank and Sigiriya rock fortress on the other. This is the first frame in the narrative and journey of a guest in the hotel, and it perfectly captures the subtle grandeur it possesses.

Bawa also skillfully made circulation separate, for hotel staff and visitors. When a guest walks through the corridor, all they see is a thick wall with small openings for connection to the outside. But hidden beneath that huge wall is a passageway for the hotel staff to move in. Using such subtle looking strong architectural elements, define the movement of a user within the space.

Corridor for guests, light and airy.



Corridor for hotel staff and operations to be done

Bawa's design for terrace gardens in the hotel felt unreal. It makes the mind wonder so as to how its possoble to create a world on a roof top. Bawa played with levels in a way which didn't seem like reachinf new heights, rather just a continuation of one entity to another. The circulation within the built form itslef was linear, but suddenly takes a shift as soon as one reaches levels built on the rooftop. Subtle level differences, slant terrain, steps covered in lush greenery make the journey within the hotel easygoing and flowy. The circulation starkly contrasts in the inside and the outside, but the one out in nature feels more organic, raw, open and soothing, without a rush to reach anywhere, just enjoying each part on one's pwn pace.

Dambulla Caves

02

Climbing the sun-baked rock toward the Dambulla caves feels like a slow shedding of the outside world. The movement is heavy and rhythmic, a physical test that makes one earn the silence waiting at the top. Once one crosses the threshold of the white veranda, the "story" shifts from the vastness of the horizon to the intimacy of the earth. As one steps into the cool, incense-heavy dark, the architecture forces one to move differently; one finds themselves walking in slow circles around golden, reclining giants, eyes tracing the natural curves of the rock ceiling that dips and swells like a living lung. It's a journey of constant discovery; one wander from the narrow, pressing shadows of the smaller caves into the sudden, echoing breath of the Great King's cavern, where the only thing moving is the steady, rhythmic drip of sacred water from the stone above.

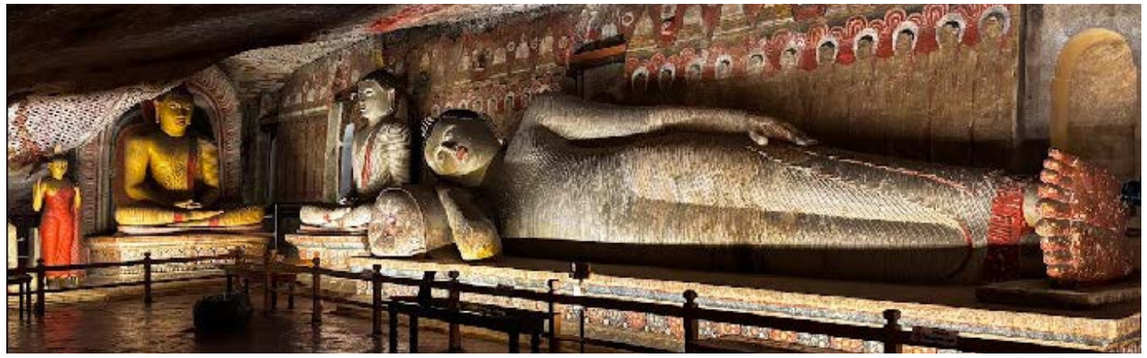
Dambulla Cave Temples

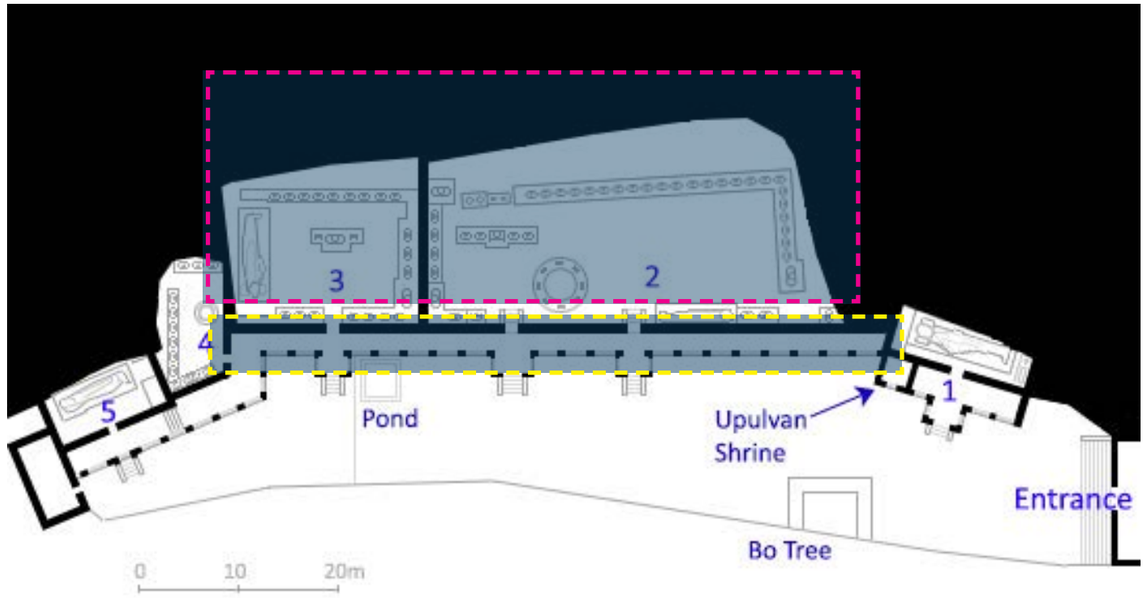
The story of the Dambulla Cave Temples is a narrative of verticality and transition. While Heritance Kandalama uses architecture to frame the landscape, Dambulla uses the landscape to frame a spiritual evolution. The initial movement towards Dambulla Caves is linear and taxing. As one ascends, the story gains perspective. With every few steps, the horizon expands, and eventually reveals itself with its white exterior front. The circulation within the halls is linear and directional. One knows exactly where to go, follow the line and move along.

But what it hides under it surprises most. Behind the axial, linear and directional circulation path, are buddhist caves which spread over the space in a very organic sense. The entrance into the caves is small, but opens up to a large span of space with multiple statues and idols of buddha. One can take any route they want inside, move according to how they feel in space, and create their own journey within. The colors inside the caves bring such a contrast to the white exterior, it almost feels overwhelming. The ceiling height gradually decreasing near the end wall also ignites a sense of movement in a person. It ignites curiosity and wonder, and on exploring these caves, one feels astonishment and appreciation for the cave and its various elements.

The caves reveal themselves frame by frame. It starts with a white built exterior with arches and columns but with a slight opening in silhouettes of what is inside. Slowly progressing forward, the frame develops furhter into an arched opening into the cave. Still it doesn't speak any volume of the elements inside. On now passing through, one truly and fully sees the cave and its grandeur. The warm colors used and the large buddha statue really speak true words of 'dont judge a book by its cover'. This part of the journey is unique to each visitor, as one can take a million ways to absorb the space.

The first two pictures represent the inside and outside context of the caves, represented as well in the plan below. The path highlighted in the yellow border represents the circulation through the first picture; linear, directional, axial and straightforward. In contras to this, the caves highlighted in pink border have open spaces, letting each visitor make their own movement through space, moving through elements which catch their eye, and letting emotions guide their journey. The circulation inside the cave is as strongly organic as the circulation outside is strongly directional. This juxtaposition makes the movement in this entity as a whole worthwhile and truly takes one by surprise.





03 Anuradhapura

Anuradhapura wasn't just a city; it was a vast, open-air prayer. Designing it was about creating a sense of grandeur through distance. To move through the city is to follow a trail of white domes that act like North Stars, pulling you across miles of forest and parkland. The journey is a constant pulse: you wander through the quiet, shaded intimacy of stone-pillared monasteries, only to have the sky suddenly crack open as you step onto the massive, sun-drenched stone plazas of the stupas. It's a city that forces you to walk, breathe, and circle; turning the simple act of traveling from a lake to a temple into a slow, rhythmic meditation where the architecture doesn't just house the spirit, but sets the pace for it.

Ruwanwaliseya

The architecture here is defined by circumambulation . There is no "inside" to the Ruwanweliseya; the heart of the story is the act of walking around the massive white dome. The whole point of the circular movement lies in the essence of searching for the deep truth within us, the very core of existence. And hence it doesn't have one specific direction, rather a mystery in finding that core.

The entire concept of this stupa lies within the belief of finding one's true deep core values. The fact that the relic in this stupa is housed at the extreme top is to prevent anyone else from reaching there, just as one shouldn't let anyone disturb or disrupt their core self. The movement around the stupa, in *pradakshina* is to provide a directionless movement to one;s journey. It is not always necessary to reach somewhere in a specific direction, some journeys are about speculation and self inspection, and truly feeling what our mind conveys to us. The same principle has been applied in the circulation here. Its radial nature allows for one to calm themselves in a rather endless loop, to stand ground and truly

Movement as Spatial Narrative

UAR23214 | Saumya Ajmera

Architecture is experienced through movement rather than form alone. Circulation defines how a space is entered, navigated, paused within, and remembered. In the work of Geoffrey Bawa, movement becomes a critical design tool that shapes spatial narrative and perception. His buildings oscillate between open-ended, informal circulation and rigid, axial movement, depending on scale, program, and social meaning. This booklet explores how Bawa uses circulation to negotiate privacy, authority, climate, and cultural memory, tracing a sequence from private houses to state architecture and historical precedents.

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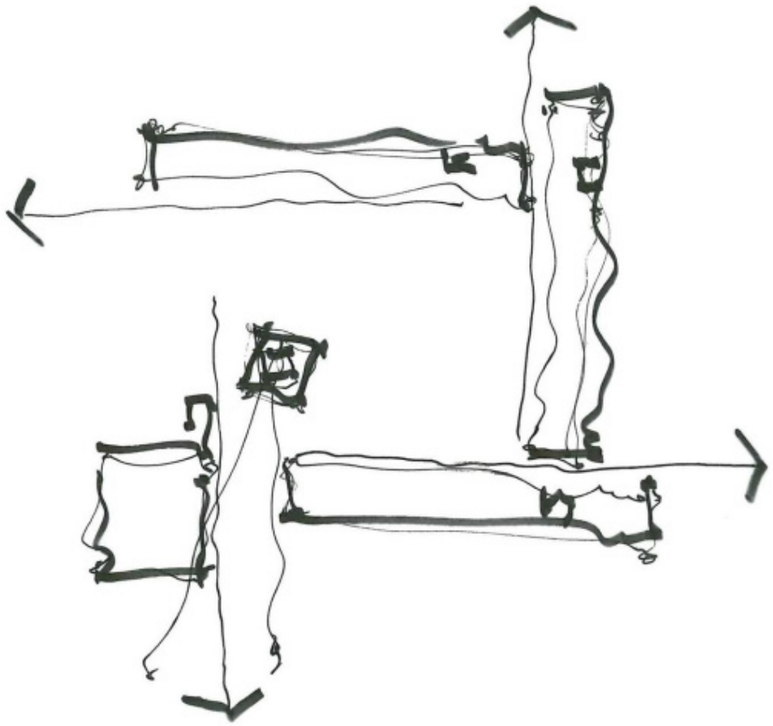
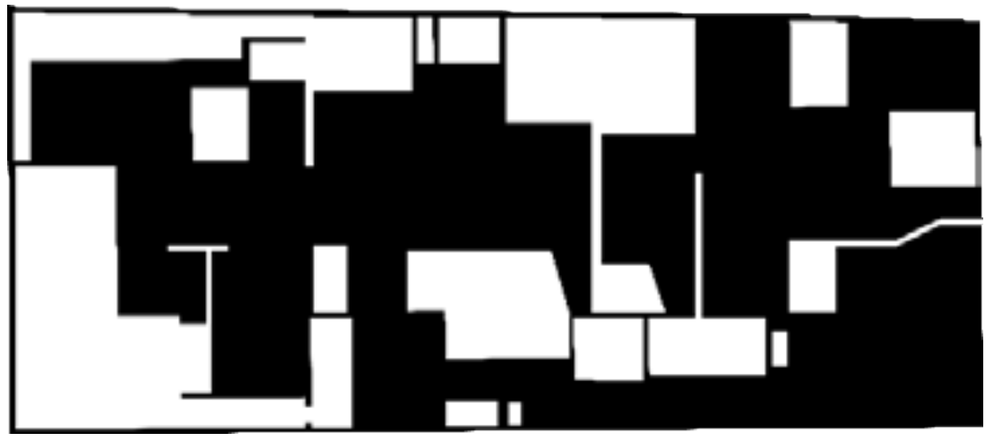
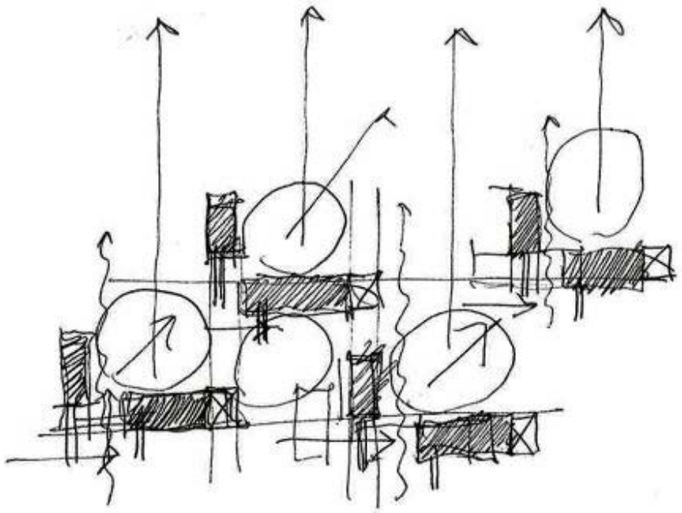




Informal and Intutive

House No. 11

House No. 11 is an inward-looking, highly personal space organized around open-to-sky courtyards. Circulation is undefined and intuitive, with no clear beginning or end. Movement happens around voids rather than through corridors, encouraging exploration and pause. Openings in the roof bring light, trees, and water into focus, while minimizing visual connection to the outside world. The absence of hierarchy allows multiple ways of experiencing the house. The spatial narrative reflects Bawa's own way of living, where architecture adapts to personal movement rather than directing it.



Informality with Control

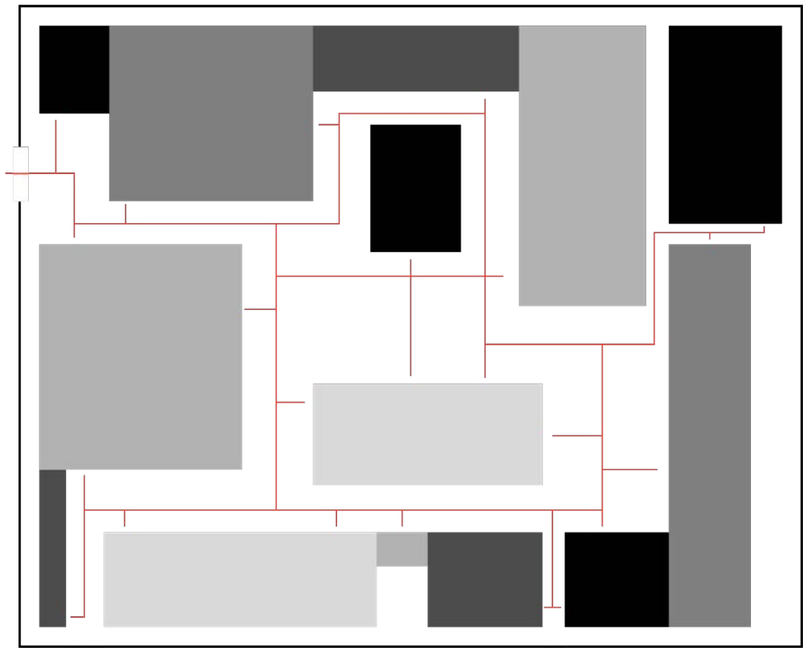
De Saram House

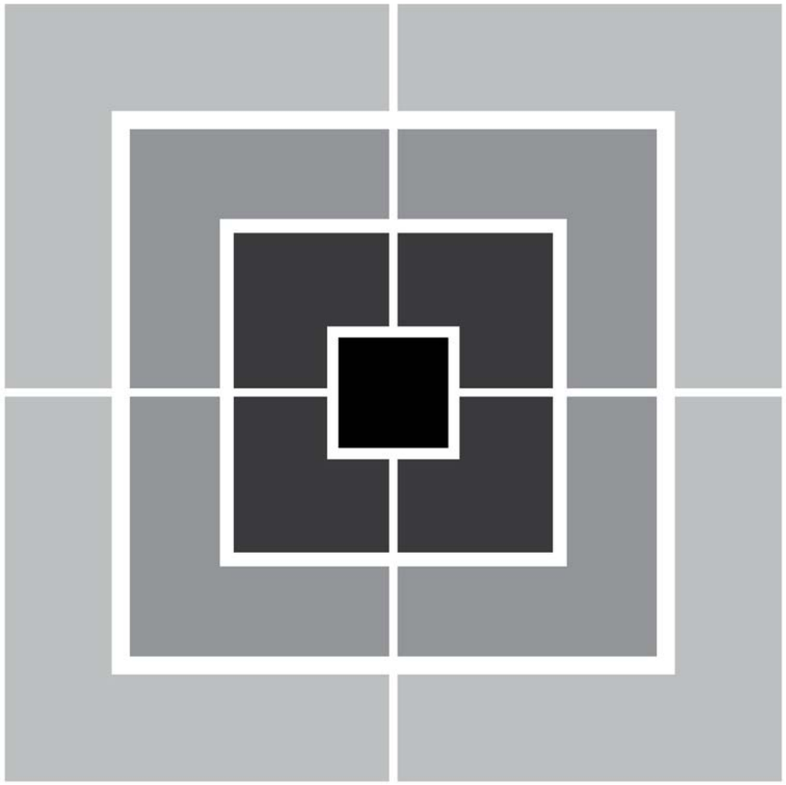
De Saram House shares the informal courtyard-based planning of House No. 11, yet presents a more controlled experience. The house is outward-looking, with large openings and porous walls responding to climate and landscape. While circulation remains fluid, it is carefully orchestrated through detailed design. Every window, door handle, and opening is crafted according to its placement and function. Movement feels relaxed, but perception is subtly guided. Bawa demonstrates how informality in circulation can coexist with architectural precision and discipline.

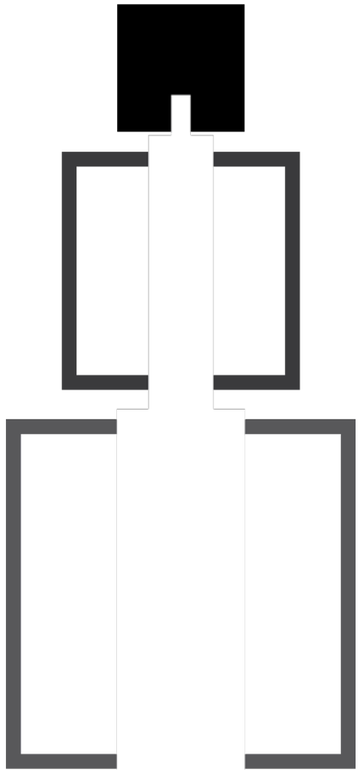
Shift in Scale

From House to State

As Bawa's architecture shifts from the domestic scale to institutional projects, circulation undergoes a fundamental transformation. Informal, exploratory movement gives way to order, hierarchy, and symbolic procession. Scale becomes a tool to control experience, turning architecture into a representation of collective identity and power. The freedom present in houses is replaced by prescribed paths and controlled access. This shift marks the transition from architecture shaped by personal experience to architecture designed to communicate authority and permanence.



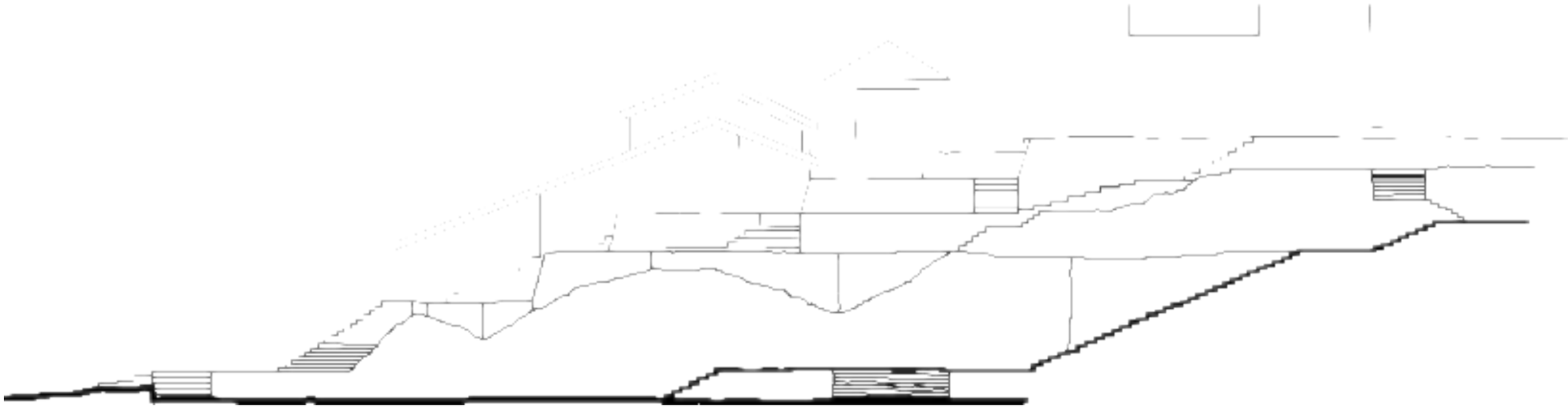




Axiality, Hierarchy and Authority

Sri Lankan Parliament

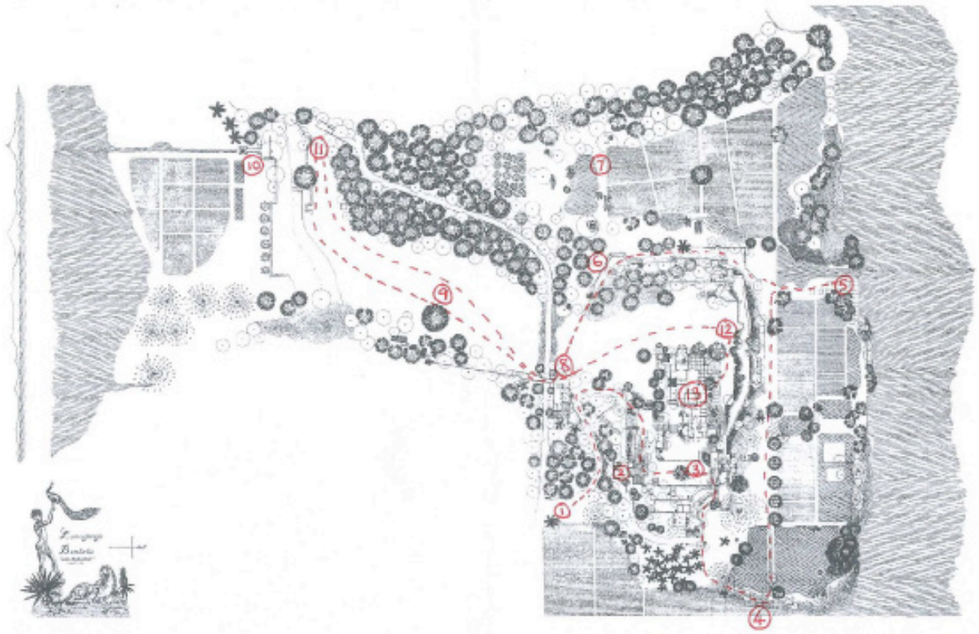
The Sri Lankan Parliament is defined by a strong axial approach across water, leading to a central, elevated assembly hall. Movement is singular, linear, and ceremonial, reinforcing political hierarchy. The Kandyan temple-inspired form, copper roof, and structural grid evoke sacred architecture, lending the building a sense of purity and permanence. Unlike Bawa's houses, circulation here is tightly controlled, allowing little deviation. The building is inward-looking and detached from public life, conveying authority rather than openness or democratic engagement.

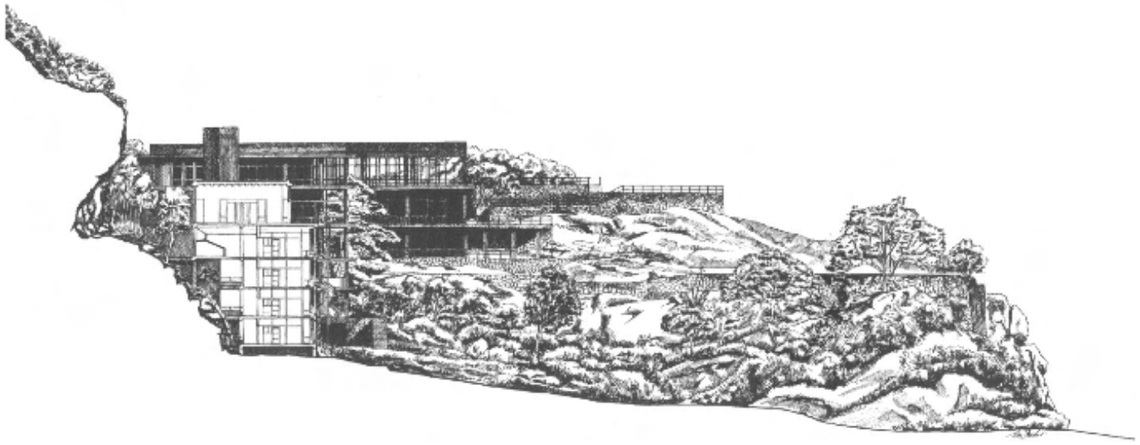


Movement as Response

Understanding Landscape

In Bawa's work, landscape actively shapescirculation.Movementisoften guided by terrain, views, wind, and light rather than rigid architectural axes. Paths bend, expand, and dissolve into open spaces, allowing experience to unfold gradually. Landscape becomes an extension of architecture, encouraging sensory engagement and climatic comfort. This approach shifts focus away from monumentality toward lived experience. Understanding this relationship between movement and landscape is essential to reading Bawa's large-scale projects, particularly his architecture of estates and resorts.

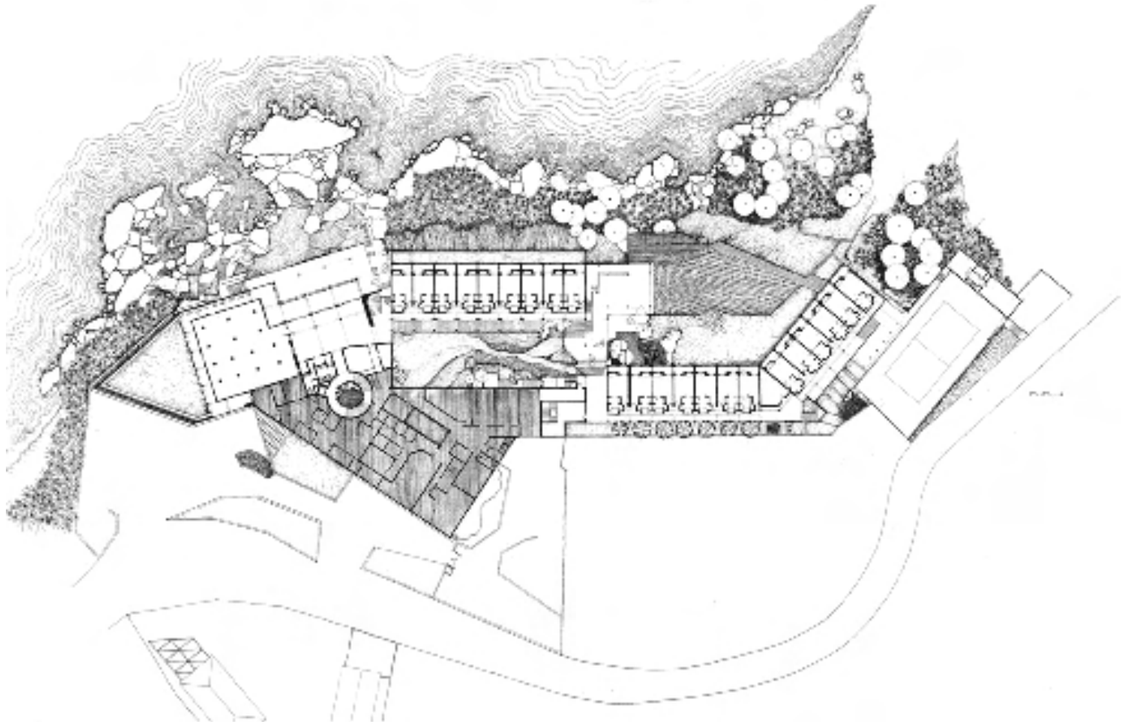




Lansdscape - Led Discourse

Heritance Kandalama

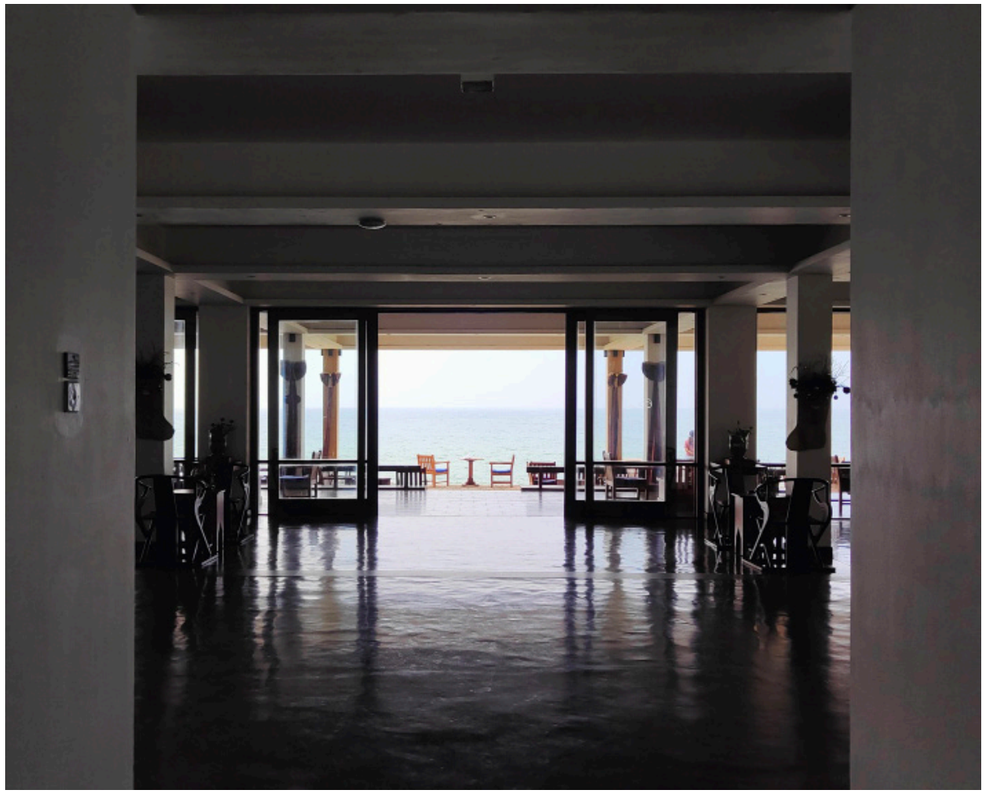
In Bawa's work, landscape actively Heritance Kandalama exemplifies movement shaped by landscape rather than hierarchy. Circulation is open-ended and dispersed, oriented toward views of the lake, Sigiriya, and Dambulla. Public spaces are highly porous, defined by columns instead of walls, allowing constant engagement with climate. Courtyards carved into the building mass focus attention on trees and exposed rock. There is no dominant axis; users create their own paths. The spatial narrative encourages lingering, exploration, and connection with nature.



Reveal, Pause and Control

Jetwing Lighthouse

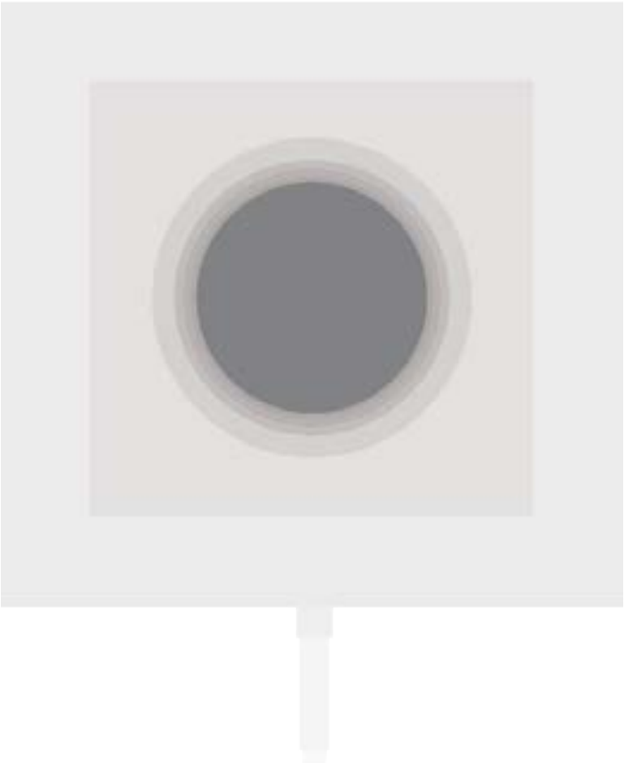
Jetwing Lighthouse uses circulation to manipulate perception through concealment and revelation. Entering from a busy road, the building quickly disconnects the visitor through inward-facing spaces and an unexpected first-floor courtyard. Movement unfolds through changes in level and framed views, often disorienting the sense of ground. The sea is revealed gradually, while access to the beach is indirect. This carefully paced circulation creates moments of pause and heightened awareness of the natural environment.



Historical Instincts

Spaces of Society, Climate & Ritual

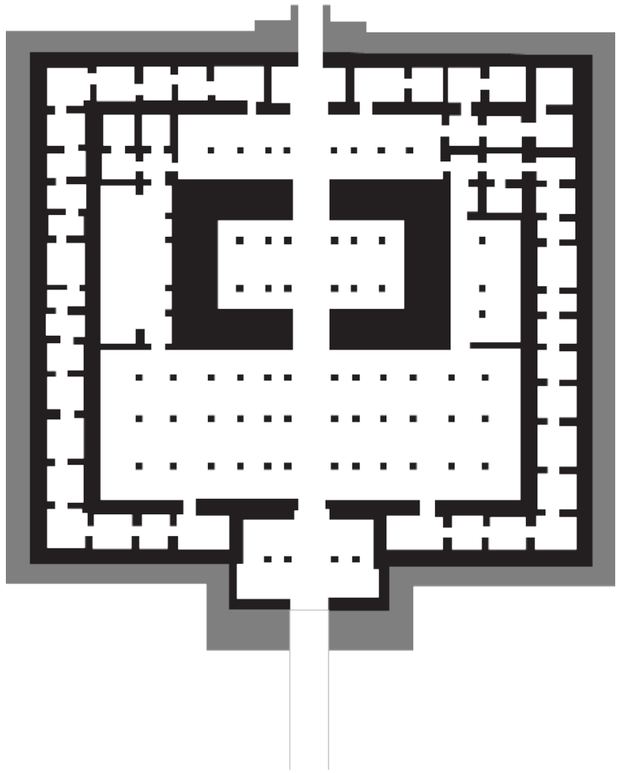
Bawa's approach to circulation is deeply rooted in social structure and climatic response. Historically, Sri Lankan architecture differentiated between formal public spaces and informal private ones, responding to both hierarchy and environment. Movement patterns were shaped by ritual importance, climate, and daily life. Bawa reinterprets these principles in a modern context, adapting traditional spatial logic to contemporary programs. His work reflects an understanding that circulation must respond not only to function, but also to social meaning and climate.



Formal Axiality and Sacred Focus

Anuradhapura

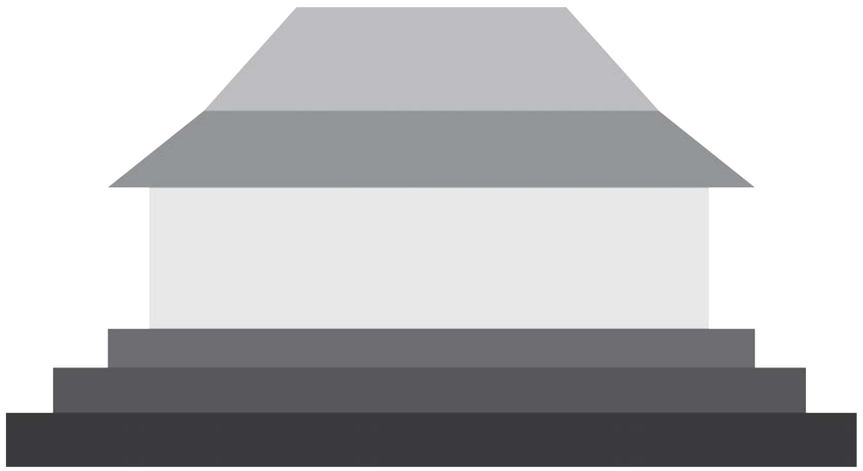
Anuradhapura is characterized by strong axial planning and centralized sacred spaces. Movement toward stupas is formal and deliberate, reinforcing religious hierarchy and focus. The axial paths guide the body and the mind toward the relics housed at the center. In contrast, surrounding residential and monastic areas are informal and dispersed. This separation between sacred order and everyday life establishes a spatial logic that strongly influences Bawa's understanding of circulation and hierarchy.



Formal and Informal Coexistence

Polonnaruwa

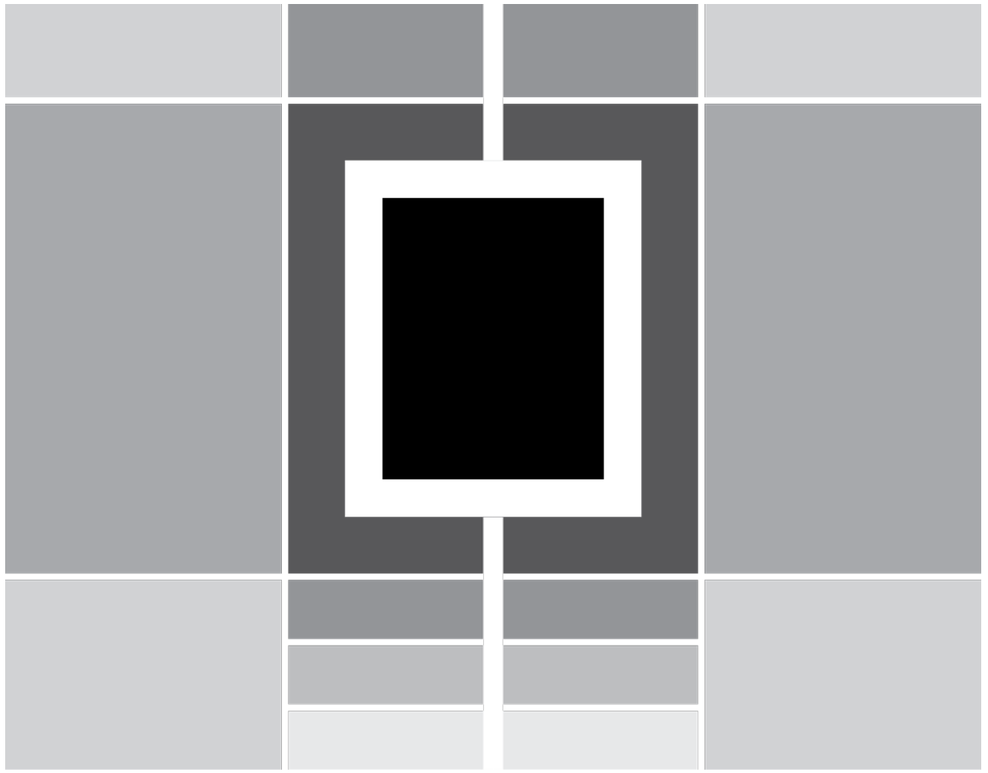
Polonnaruwa demonstrates a clear distinction between formal and informal spatial organization. The palace complexes and ceremonial spaces follow strict axial grids, while monasteries and living spaces are loosely arranged and adaptable. Movement in public spaces is controlled and symbolic, whereas private spaces allow freedom and flexibility. This duality between authority and habitation is reflected in Bawa's work, where circulation varies according to social function and scale.

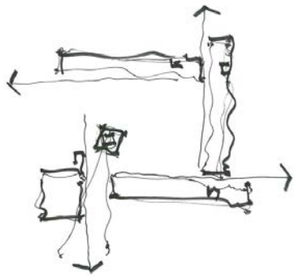


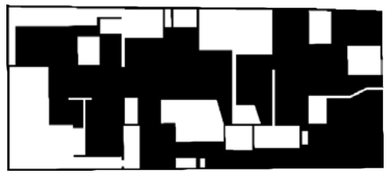
Form as Relic

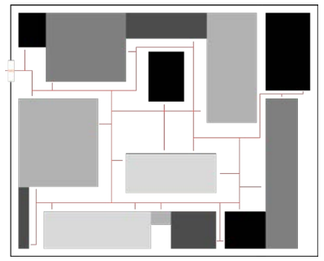
Temple of Tooth, Kandy

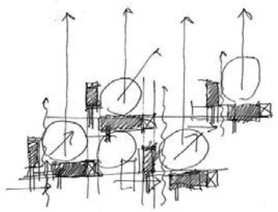
The Temple of the Tooth in Kandy embodies sacred, controlled movement. Positioned at the center of the palace complex, it is approached through a sequence of layered spaces that heighten its spiritual importance. Circulation is axial and restricted, reinforcing hierarchy and ritual. The architecture is inward-looking and sculptural, deliberately separated from the city. This spatial narrative closely parallels Bawa's Parliament, where controlled movement and symbolic form are used to express authority and reverence.

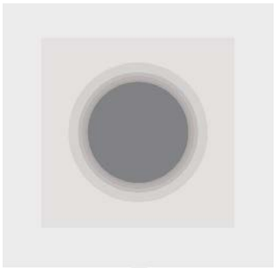


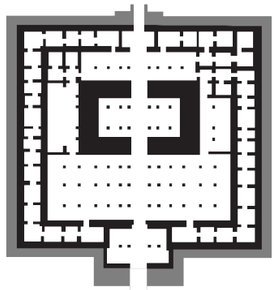


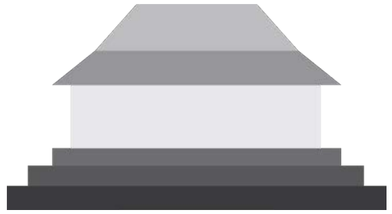


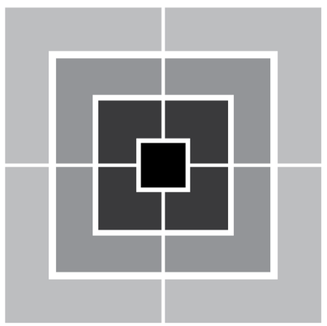


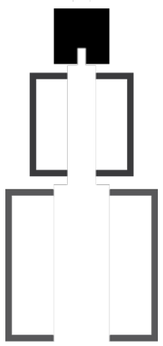


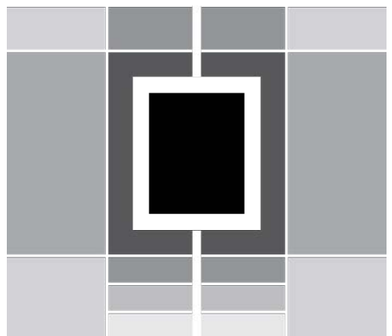


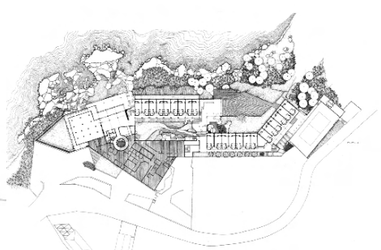


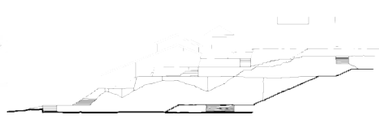












Conclusion

Movement as Dialogue

Across scales and programs, Geoffrey Bawa uses circulation to construct meaning. Informal movement allows personal experience and climatic engagement, while formal axial movement reinforces hierarchy and authority. By drawing from landscape, history, and social structure, Bawa creates architecture that is deeply experiential. Movement becomes the medium through which his buildings communicate values—privacy, power, openness, or reverence. His work demonstrates that spatial narrative is not incidental, but a deliberate architectural ideology.

CHROMATIC HISTORIES

Ananya Aravind | UAR23015

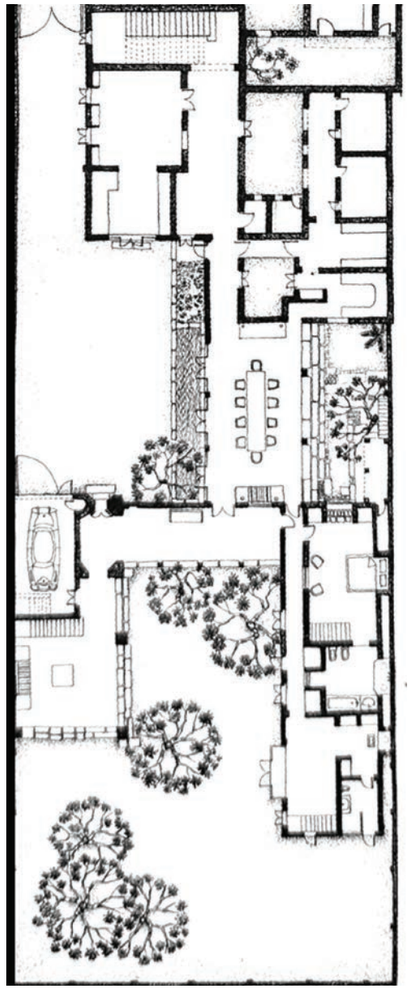
This study attempts to document and explore the usage and prevalence of colors(hues, tones, tints and shades) through the various architectural as well as non-architectural projects across sri lanka. The relevance and abundance of certain colors will also be assessed across time-periods, architectural styles as well as their importance in creating spatial continuity, depth, influencing perception and so on.

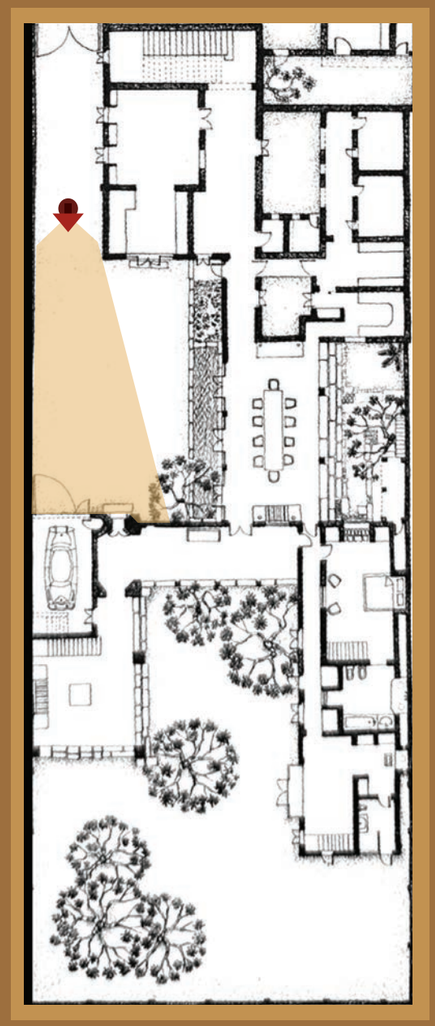
A comparative study will cross-examine the usage of color across the scale of structures, furniture, materials, as well as landscaping to understand its tangible impact on the immediate surroundings.

A similar analysis will be done for de saram house, house 11, lunuganga, bewis bawa brief gardens, materials from polannaruwa and anuradhapura, and the frescoes of Dambulla Cave Temples.

05c

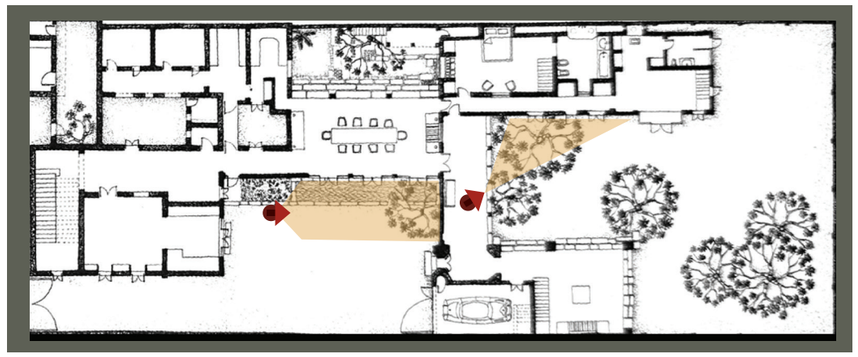
De Saram House





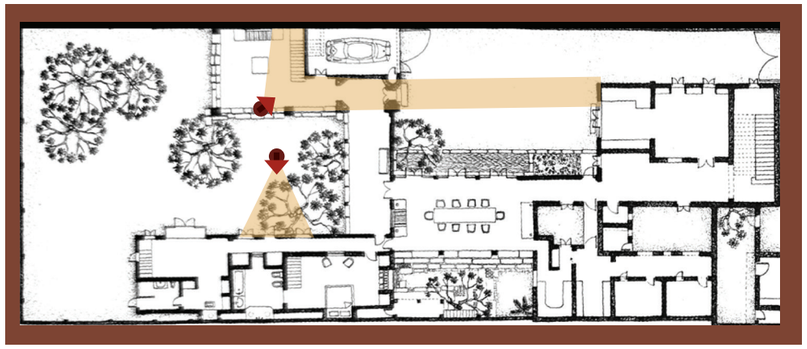
Entrance to De Saram House

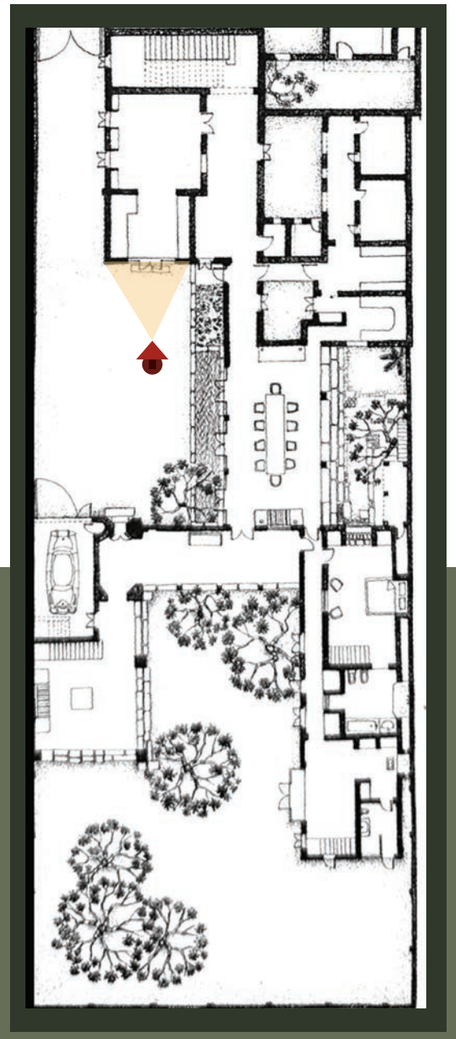
Color through aged water bodies



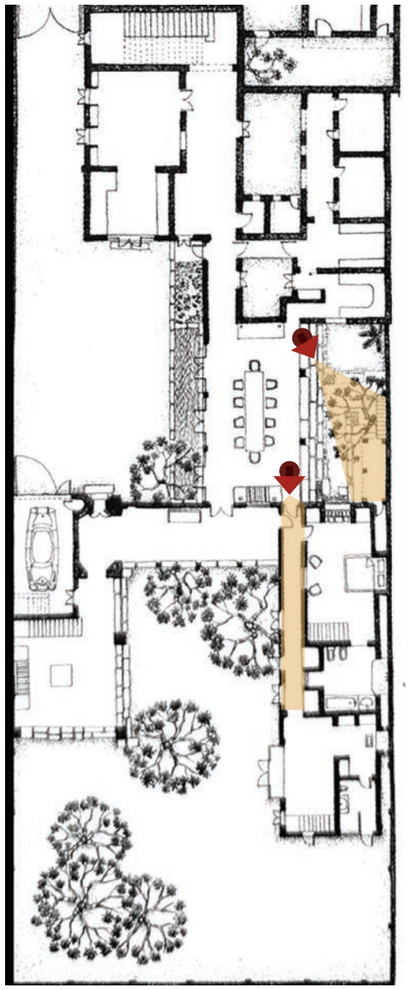
Color through paint and framing

Colored Furniture

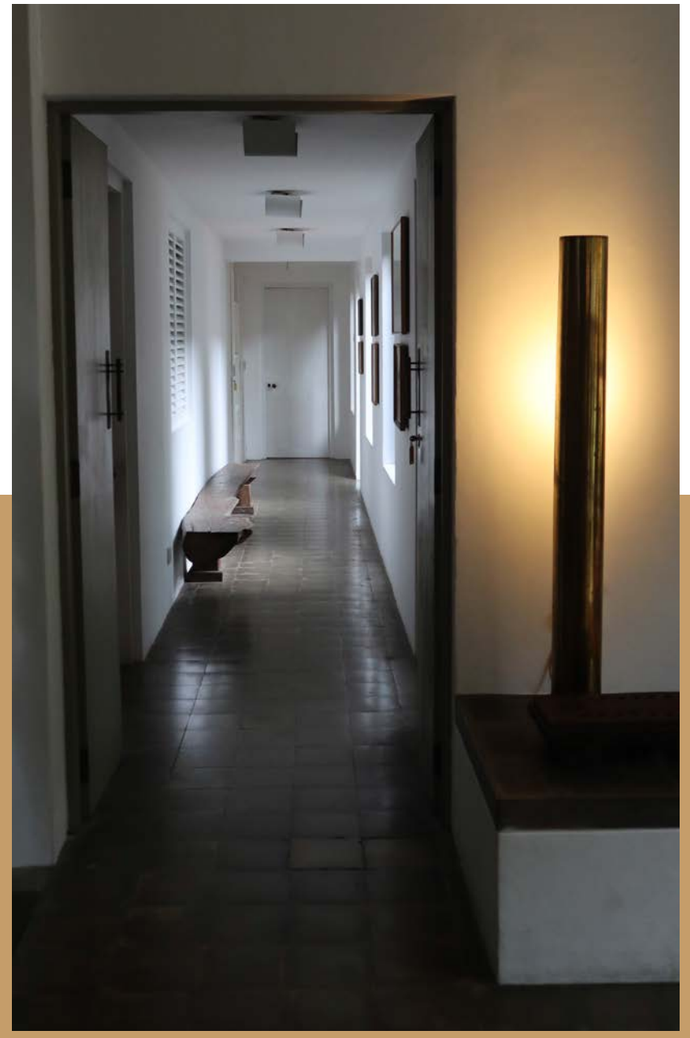




Colored induced through landscaping and roofing material

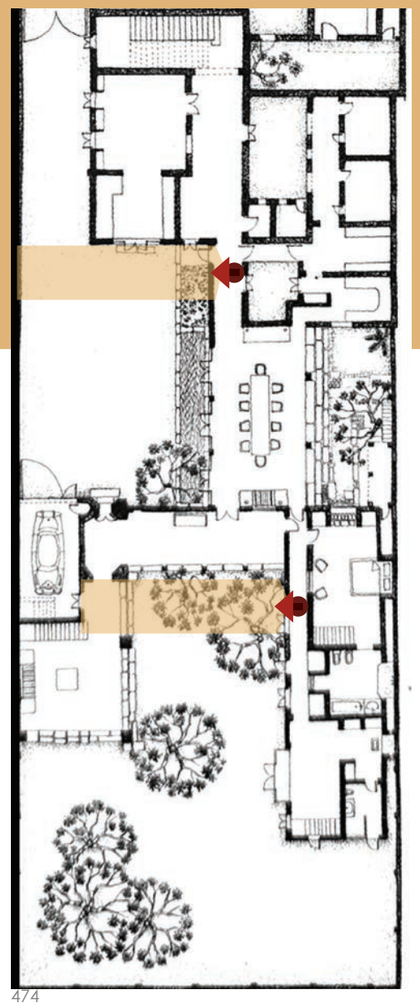


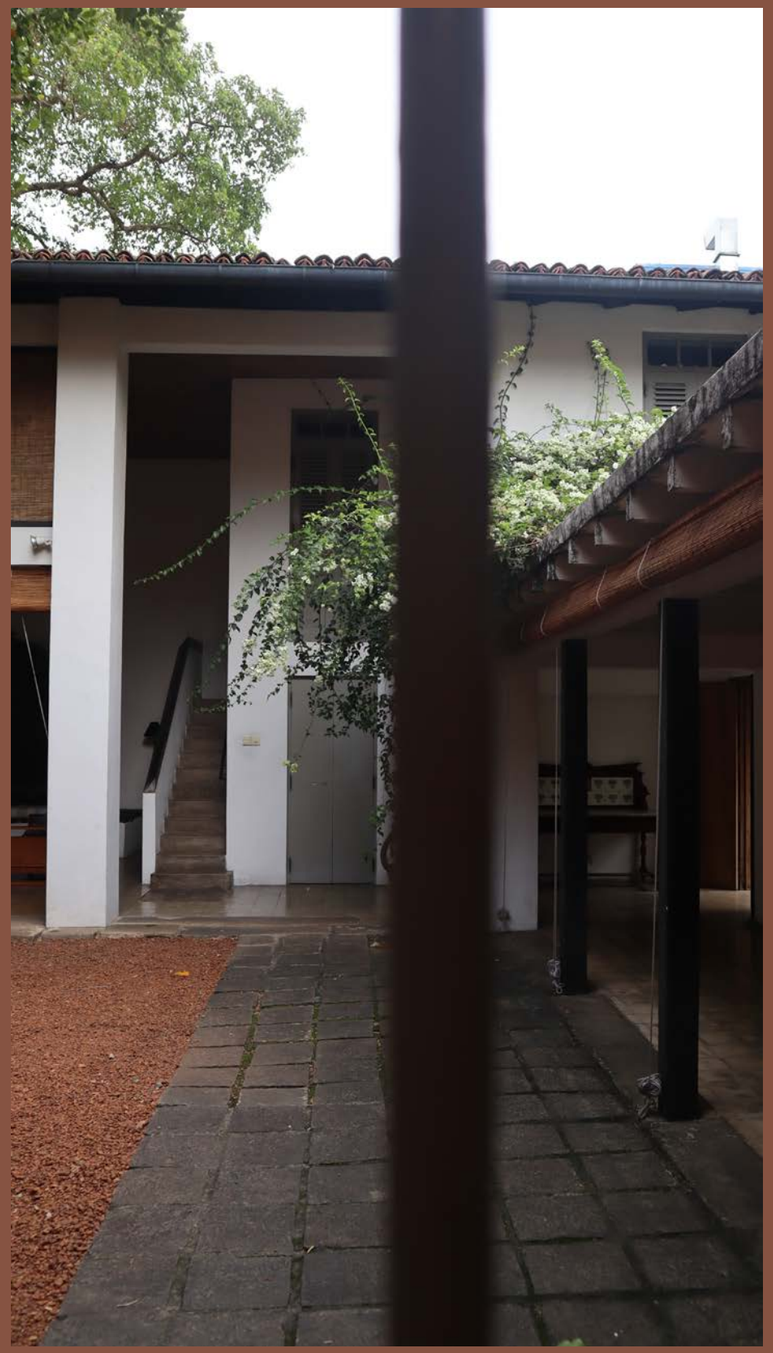
Colored Walls as spatial dividers



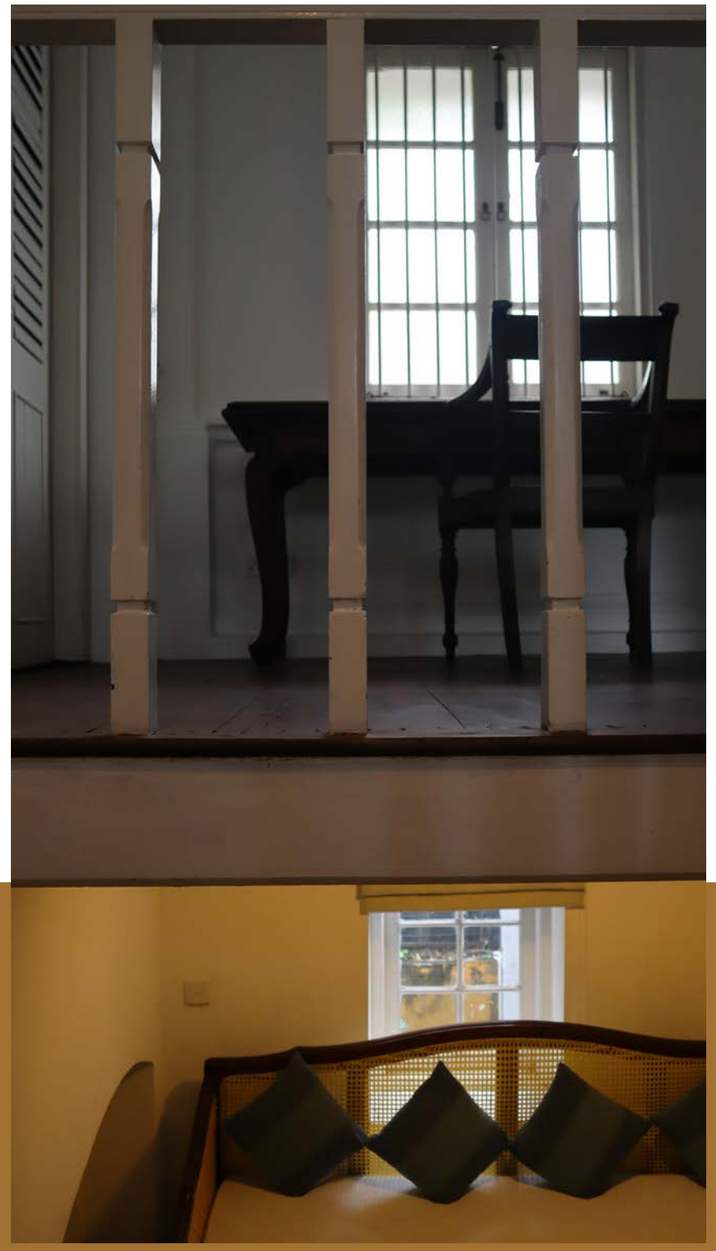
Color induced through lighting devices

Colored Walls as Focal Points



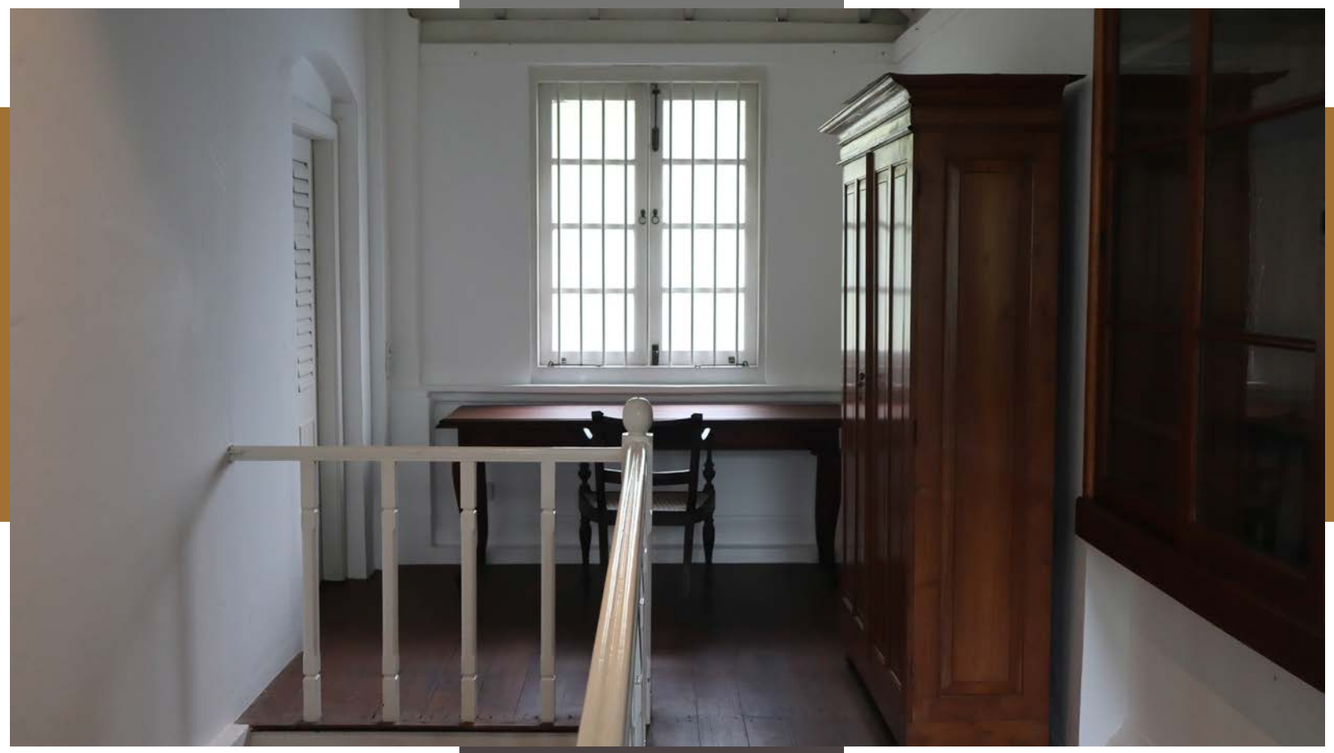


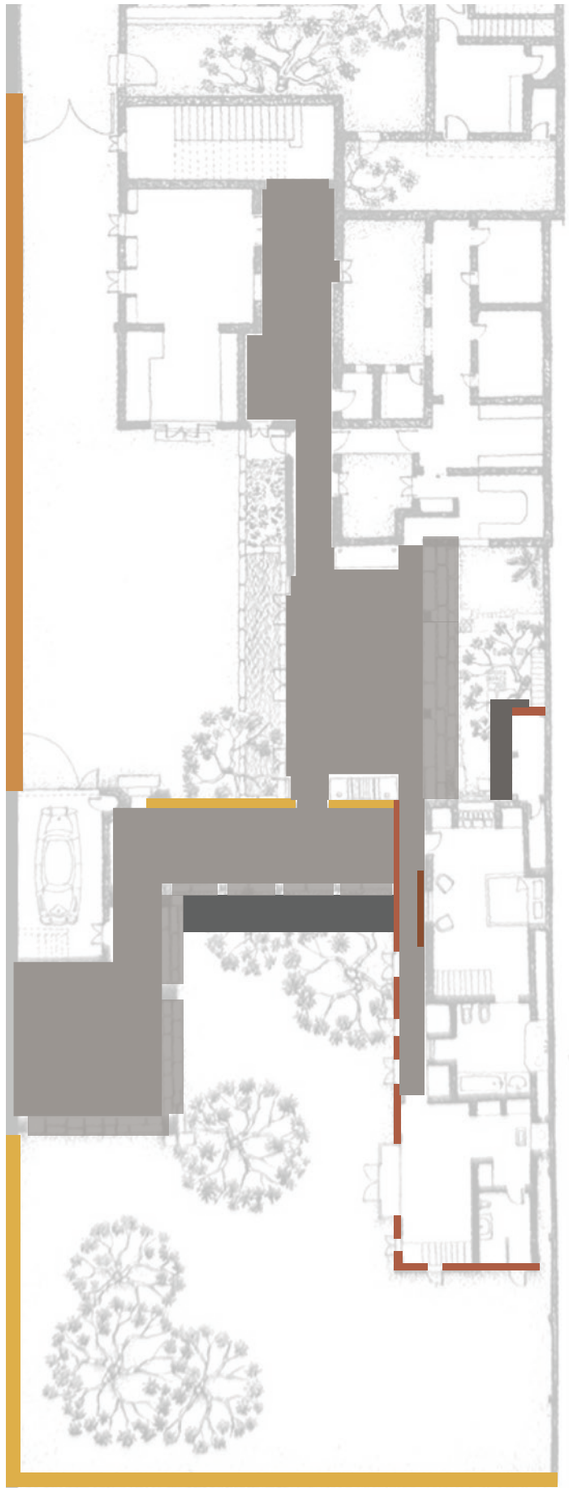
Similarly colored material palettes across the ground and blinds



Color induced through lighting

Color induced through material and furniture





Outer Walls

Floor

Green Spaces

Outdoor Spaces

De Saram House

After analyzing every frame of every room within the house, an overall color palette emerges that begins to reveal the level of design and color theory kept in mind while curating each space.

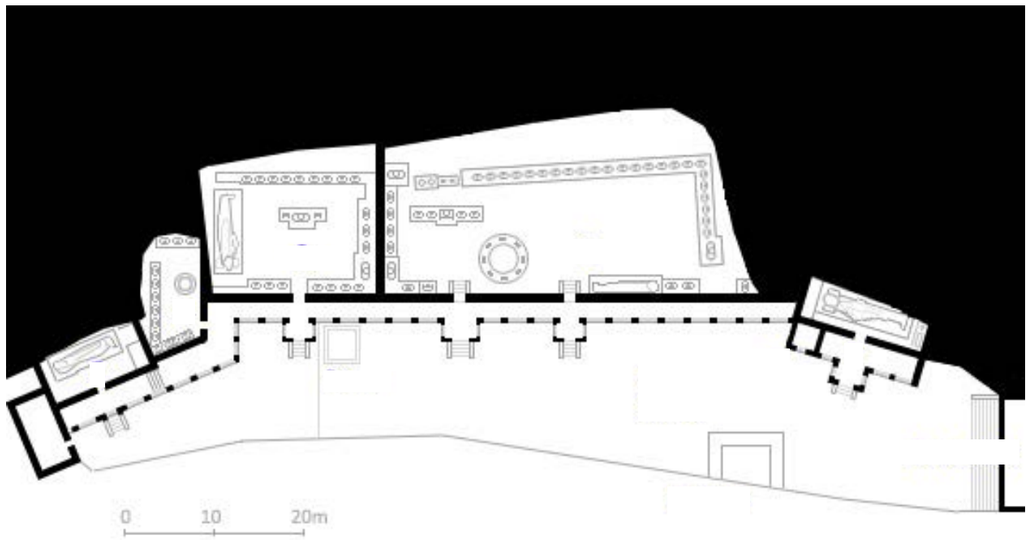
The major colors across each space were not only from architectural elements- but also **furniture and lighting.**

De Saram House

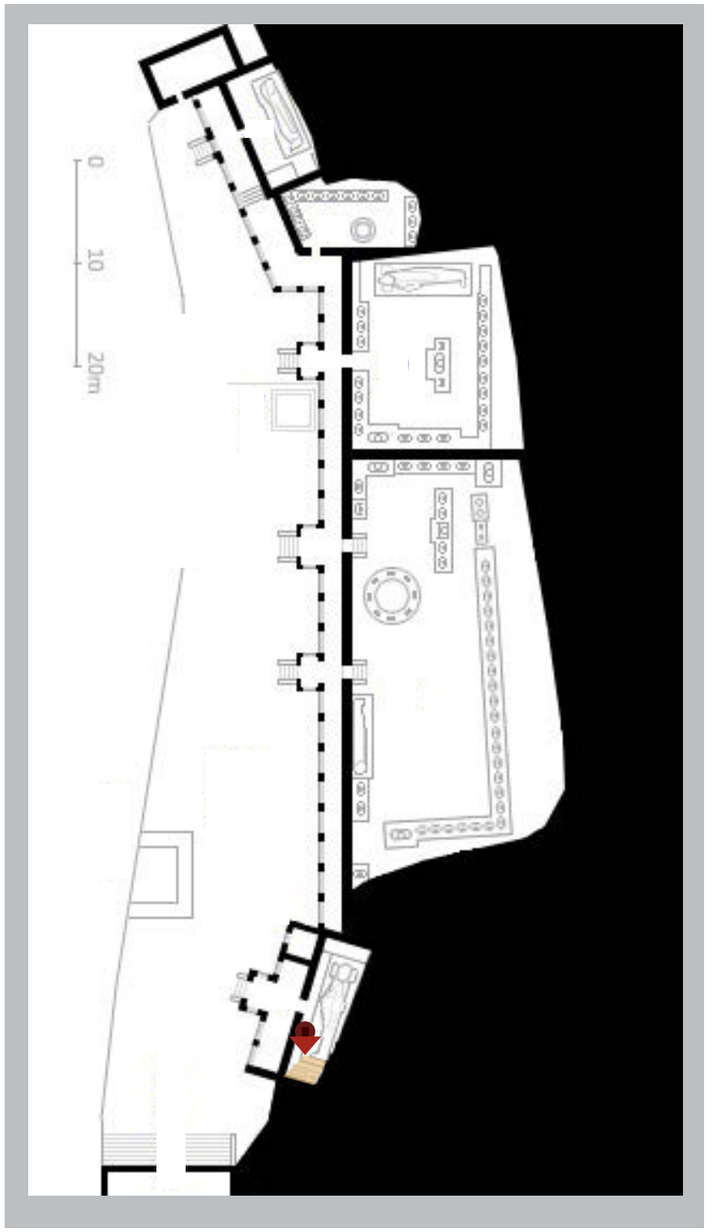
De Saram House utilises a unique interplay of colors. The plan (pictured on the right), showcases the variation and enormity of the usage of colors to create **spatial depth, pause-points, and continuity.**

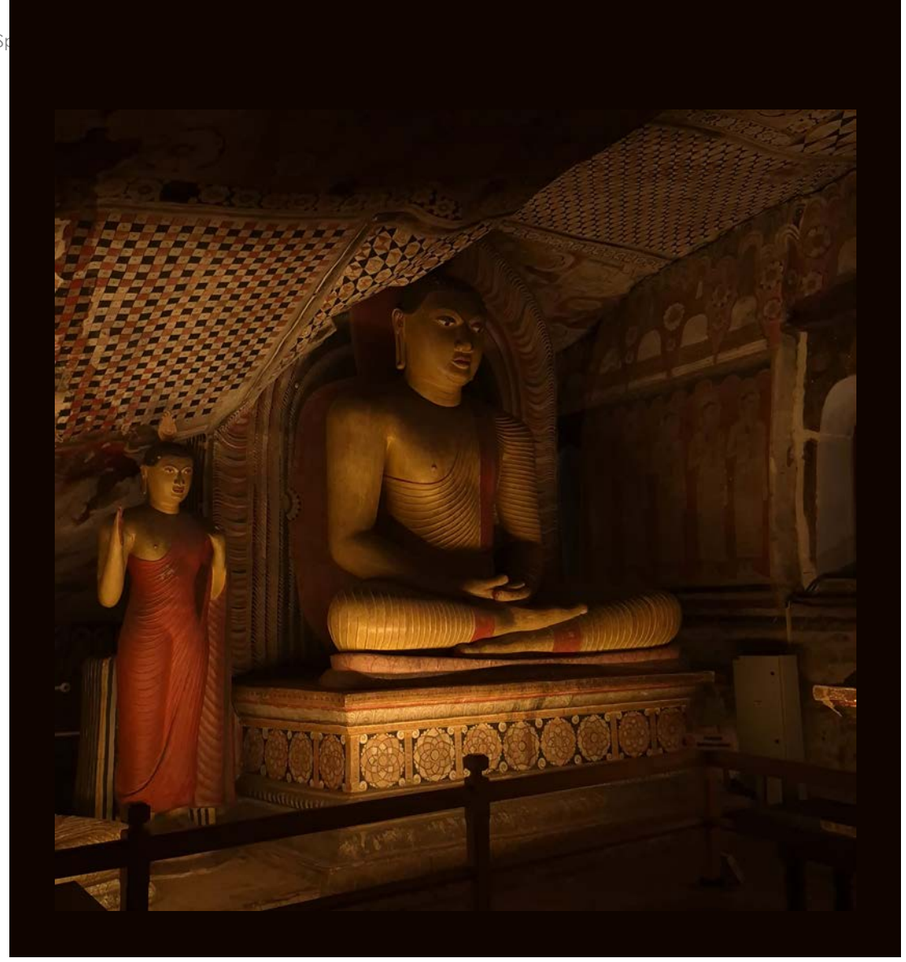
Color is, often times, used as a spatial article that helps users negotiate movement.

Dambulla Cave Temple

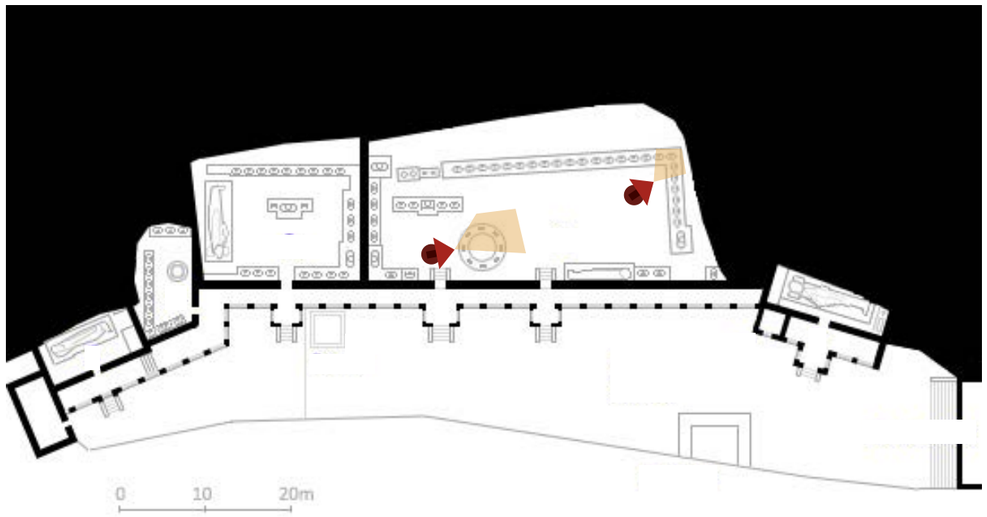


Color as emphasis

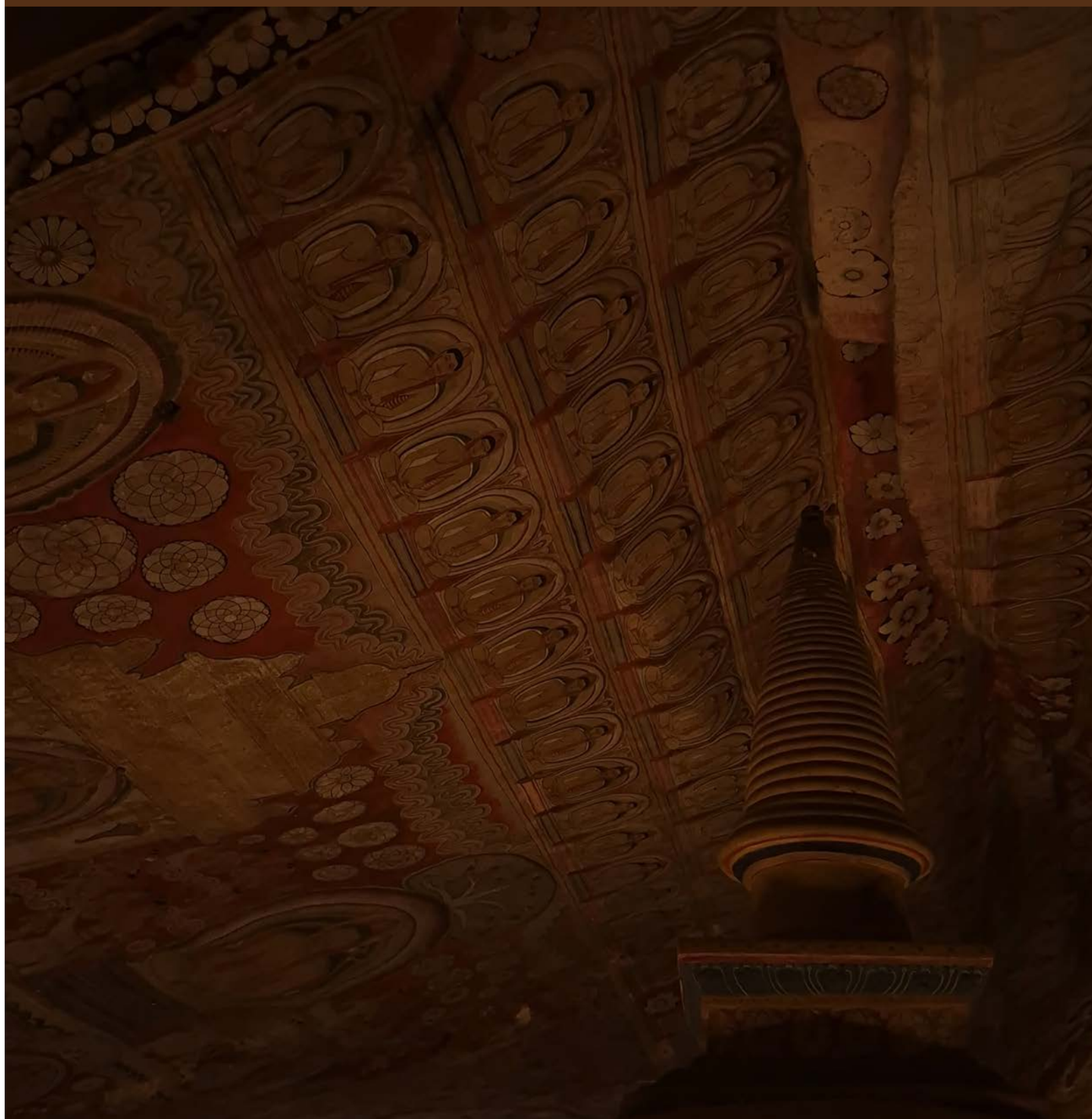


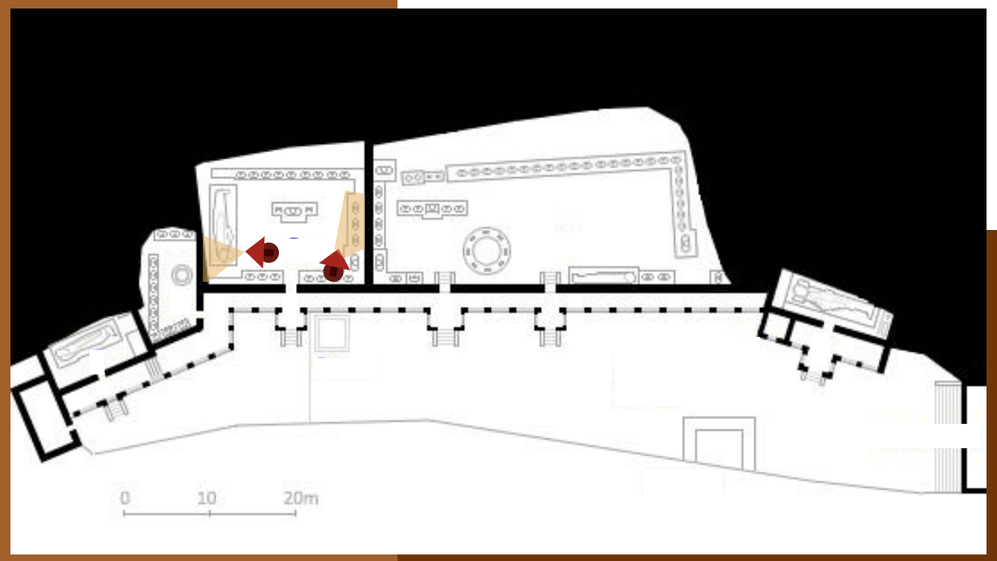


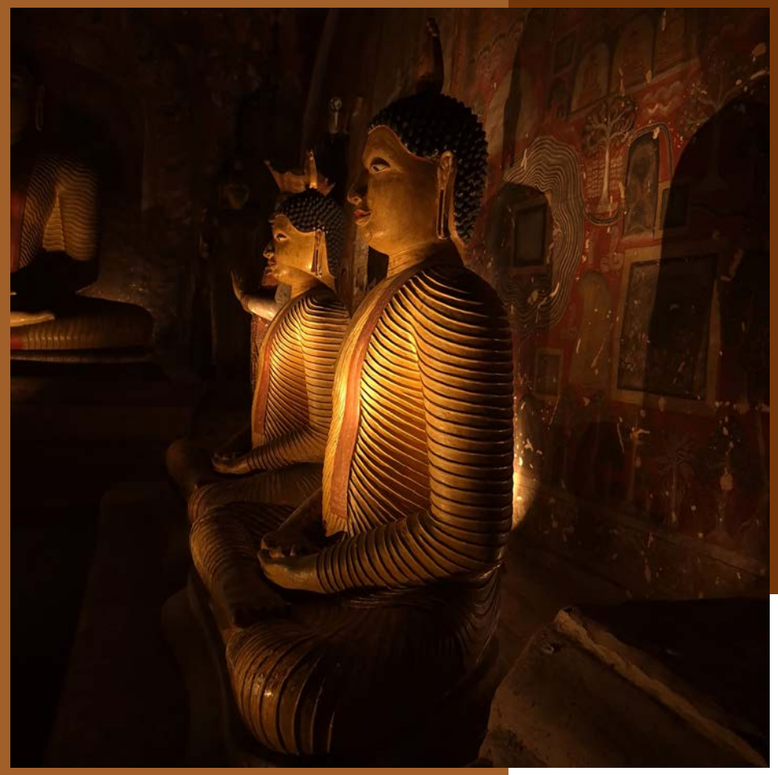
Color as motifs

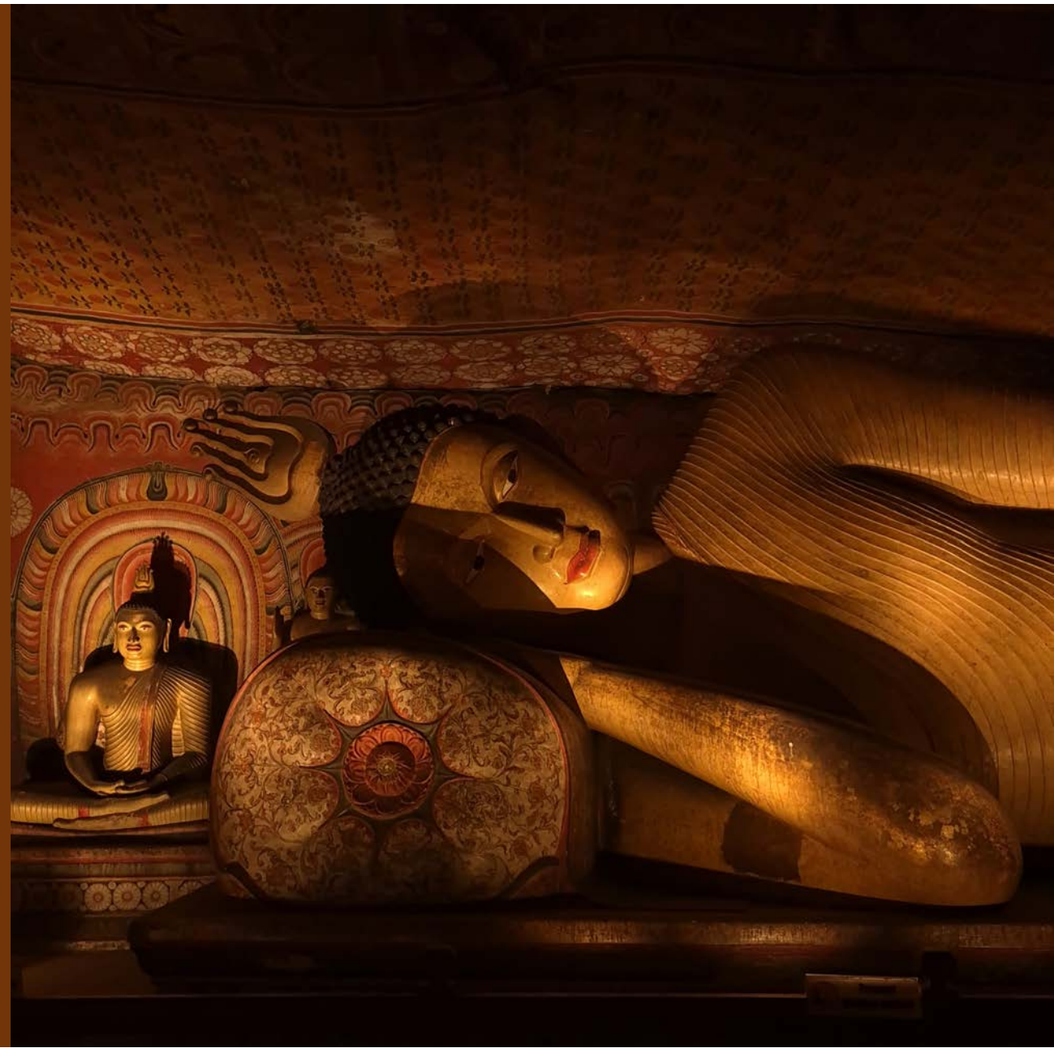


Color as emblems



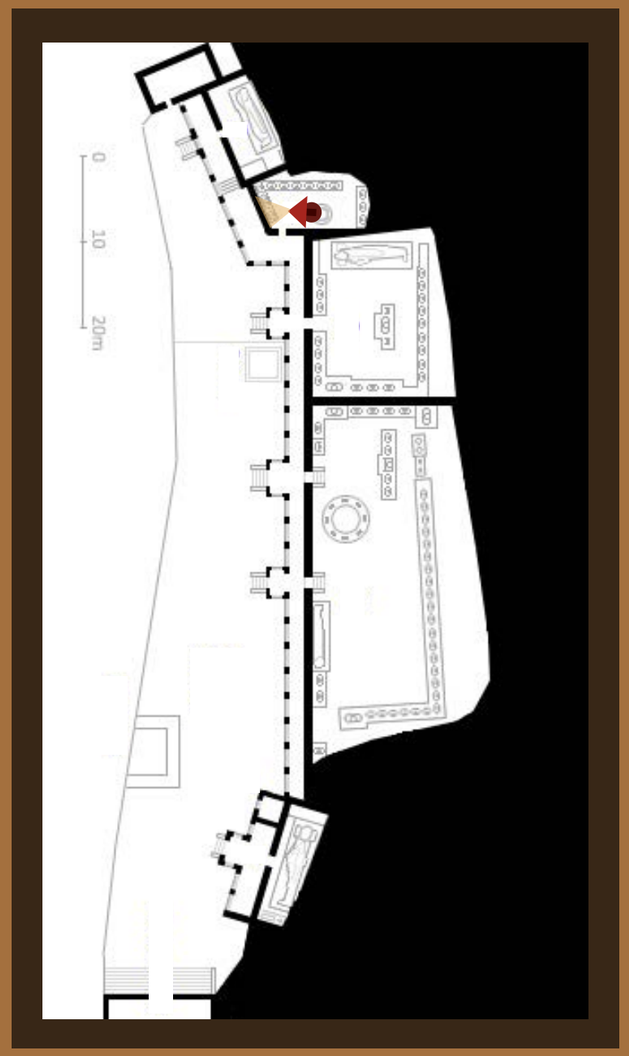


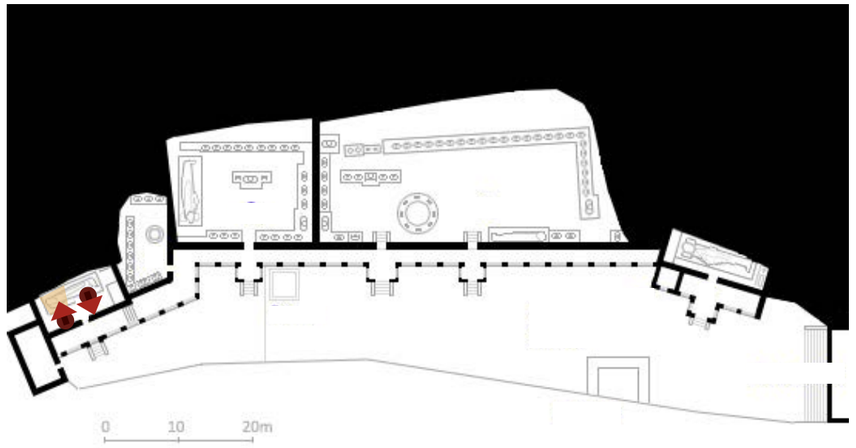




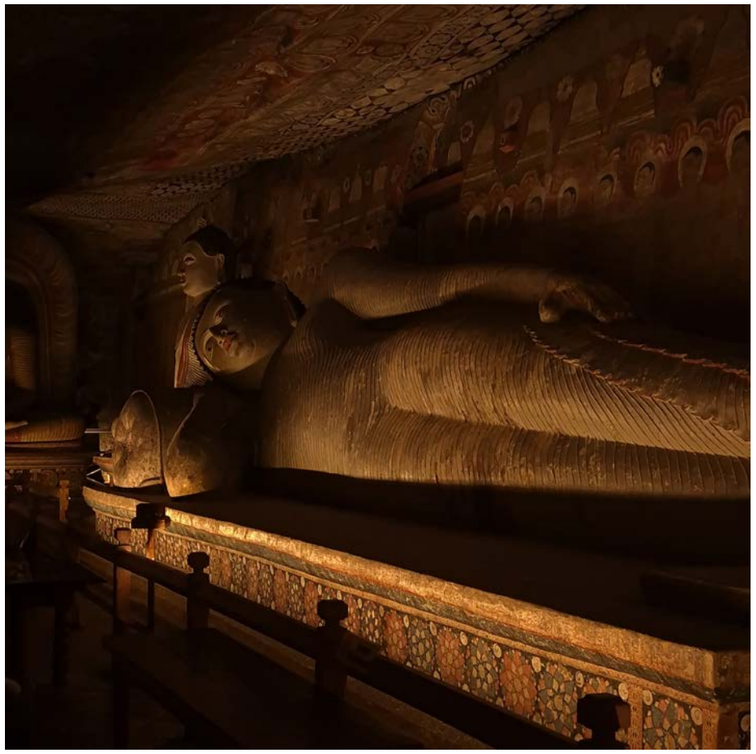
Color through light

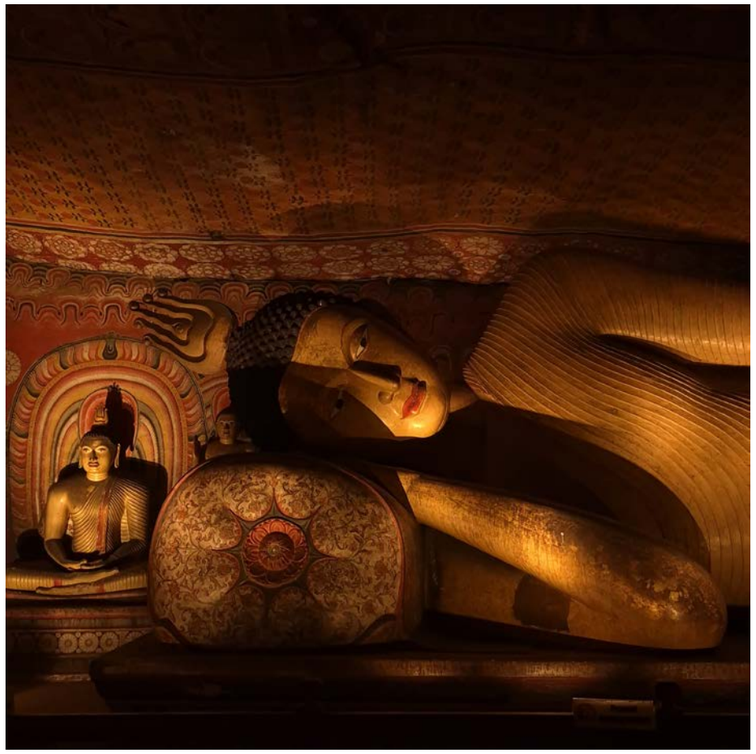
Color through patterns

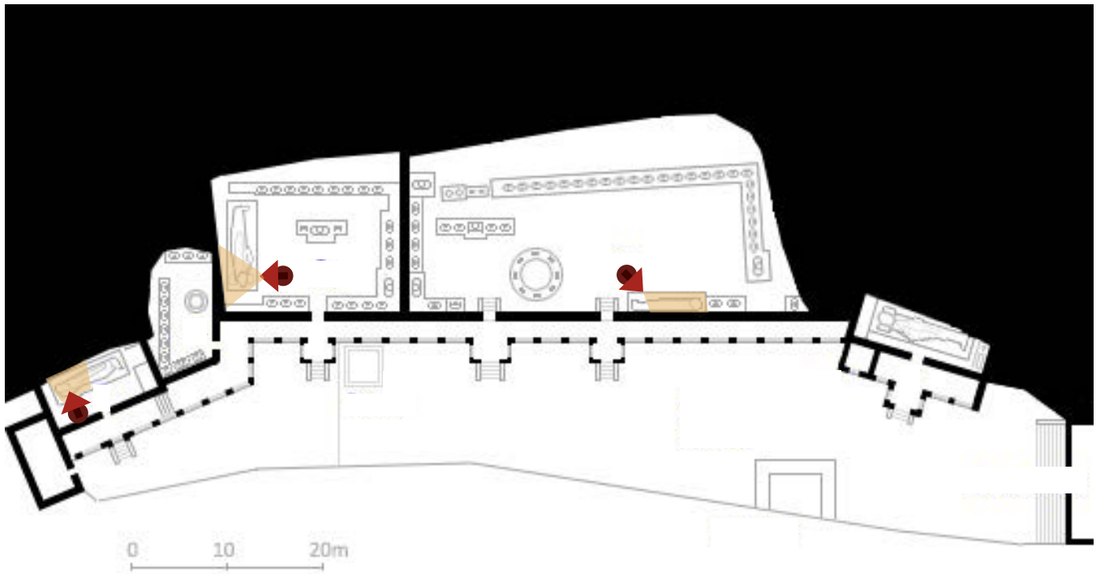




Color through reliefs



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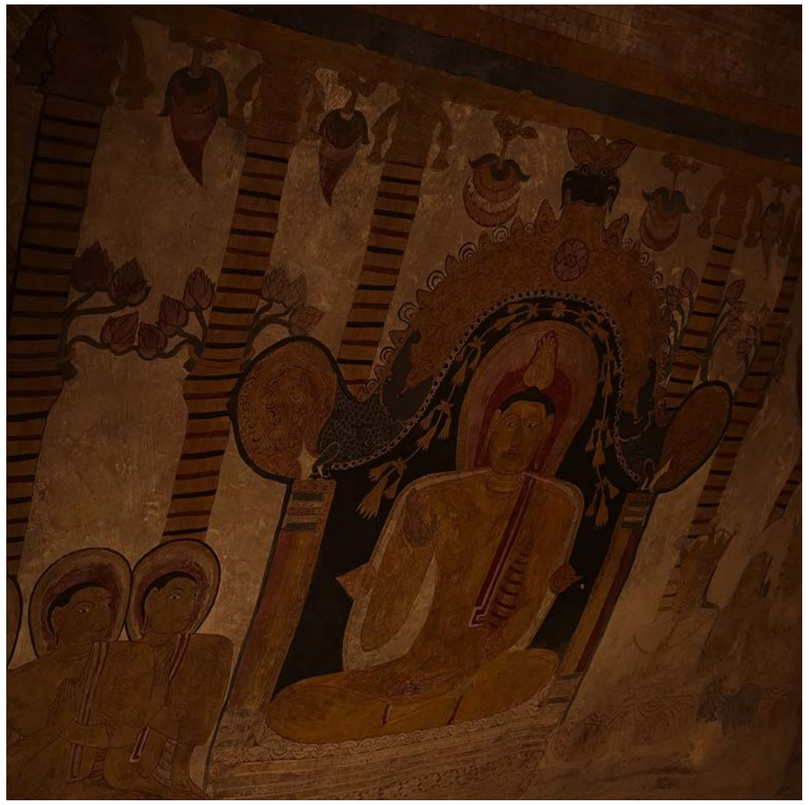
Dambulla Cave Frescoes

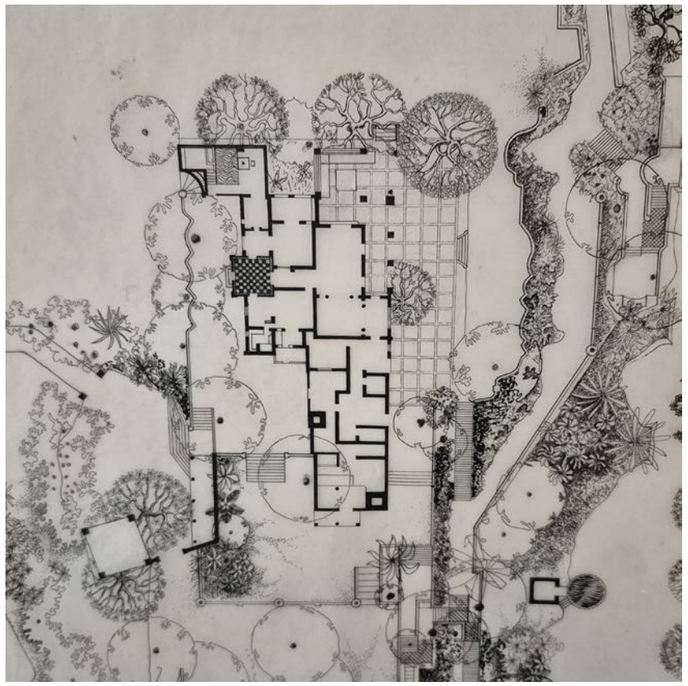
The Dambulla Cave Temples contain a myriad of painted frescoes to accompany the statues of buddha. Across five major chambers- elaborately detailed paintings were made on the largely non-uniform and undulating surfaces of the cave walls.

Here, the utilisation of colors and patterns help in **story-telling**, with countless murals depicting the circular attempt at the pursuance of enlightenment, Buddha's life , and many such inscriptions.

At places where the murals turn into abstract patterns, they are used to exemplify the statues placed in the **foreground**-providing a patterned backdrop for the deities.

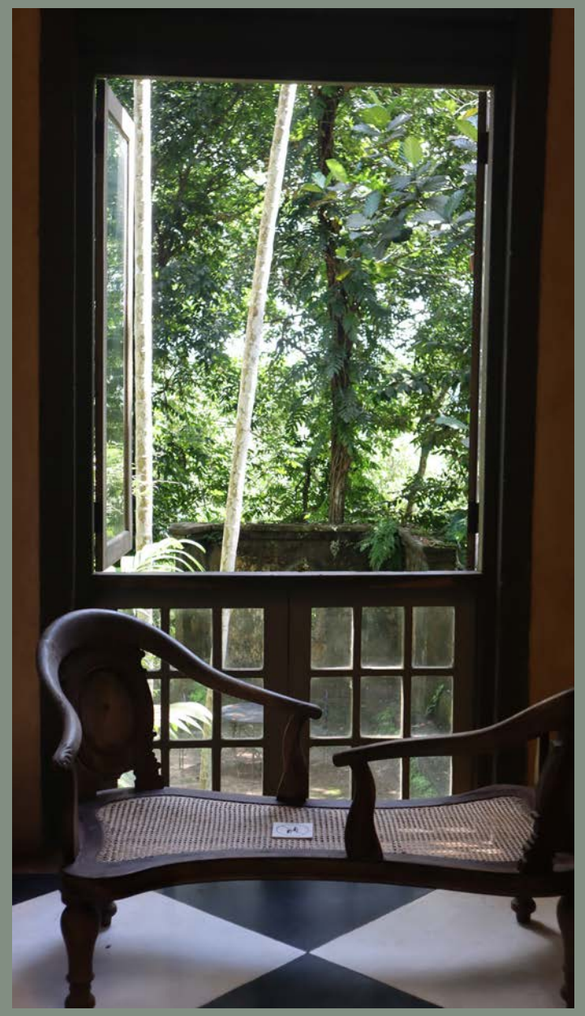


Lunuganga Estate



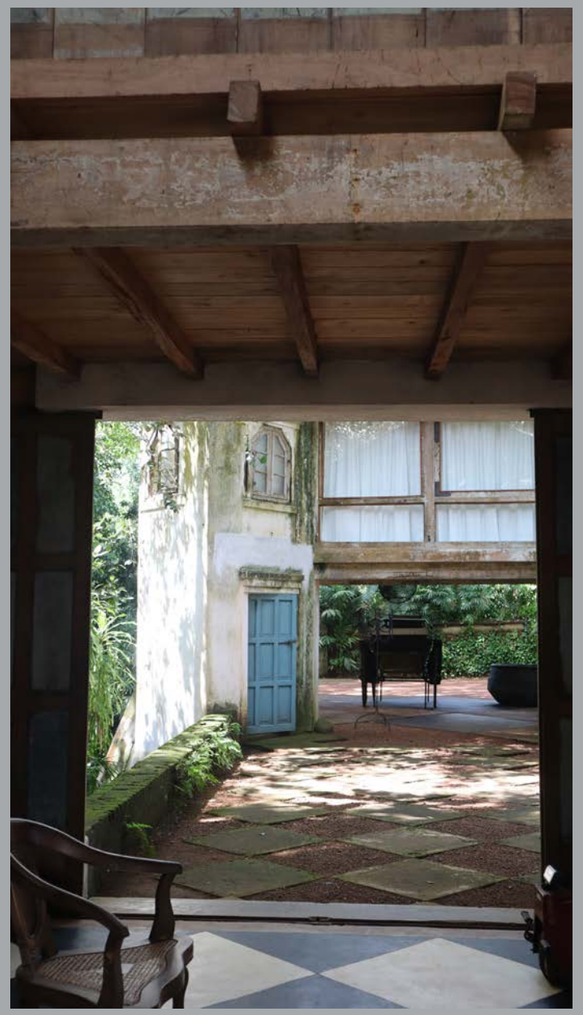
Color to higlhlight

Colored to blend in



color through experimental materiality

color expressed through frames



Color across thresholds

Color across thresholds
and patterns

Color through furniture and collectibles

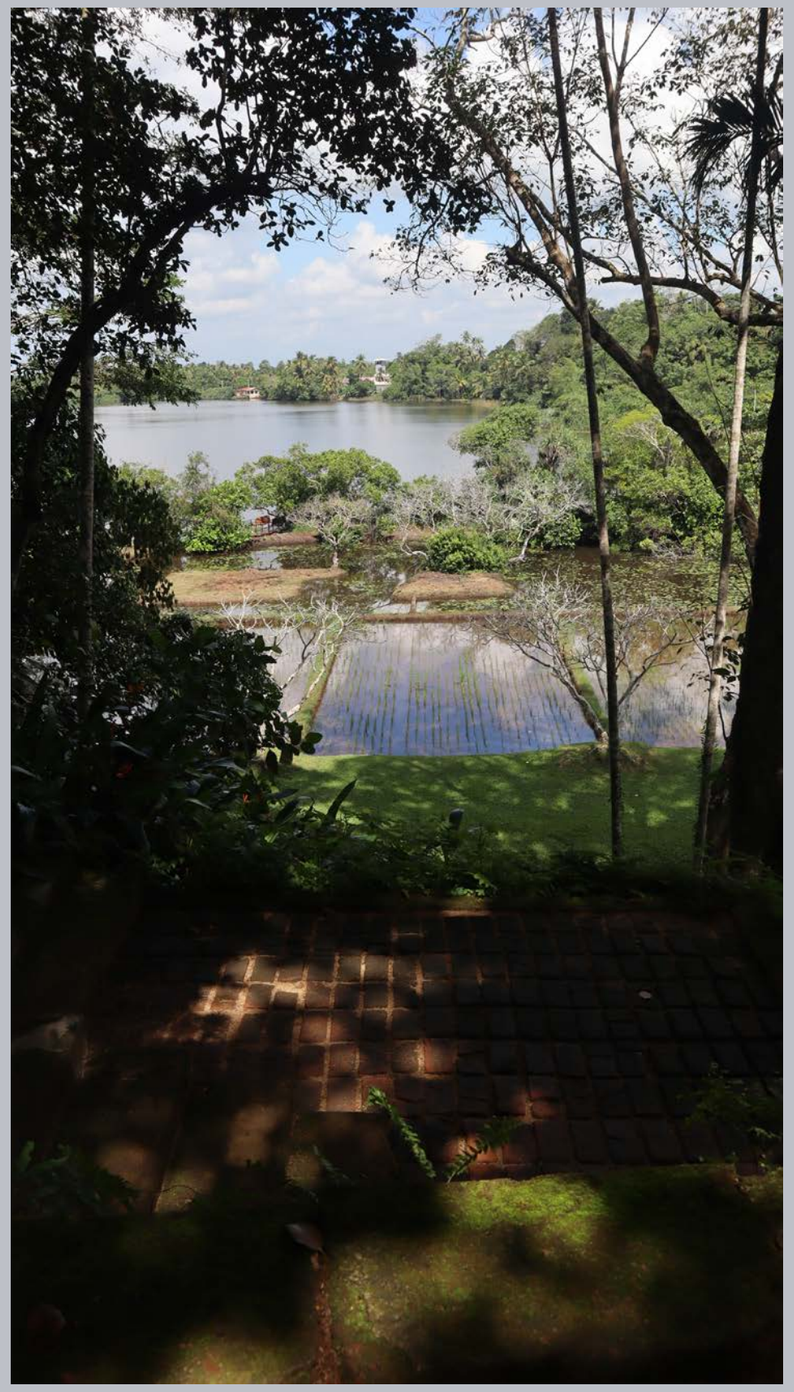
Color to highlight

Color to complement

Lunuganga Estate

Colors in Lunuganga help negotiate the ideas of **inside and outside living**, with most structures interspersed between landscaping. Colors help place/ hide each of these structures- **chameleonic** to certain degrees.

This overall color palette remains earthy yet **archival** due to the span of the project being over four decades. Many structures also begin to weather over time, absorbing a **patina** of age.



Color across natural landscaping

Choreography of spaces

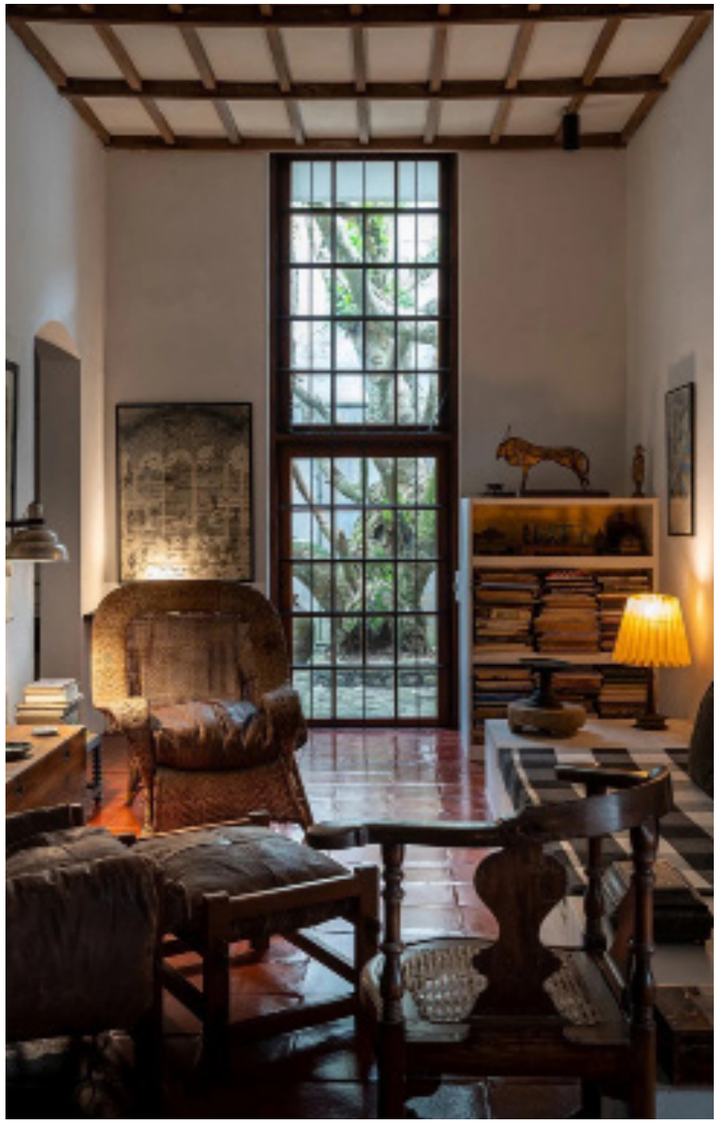
Bhargav Patel

Movement in architecture is often reduced to efficiency corridors, stairs, and paths that merely connect one space to another. Yet within the landscapes of Sri Lanka, movement becomes something far richer: a carefully choreographed experience shaped by climate, culture, ritual, and power. From ancient sacred cities to the modern works of Geoffrey Bawa, circulation is not simply a functional necessity but a spatial narrative that unfolds through time, light, and terrain.

05d

House no.11

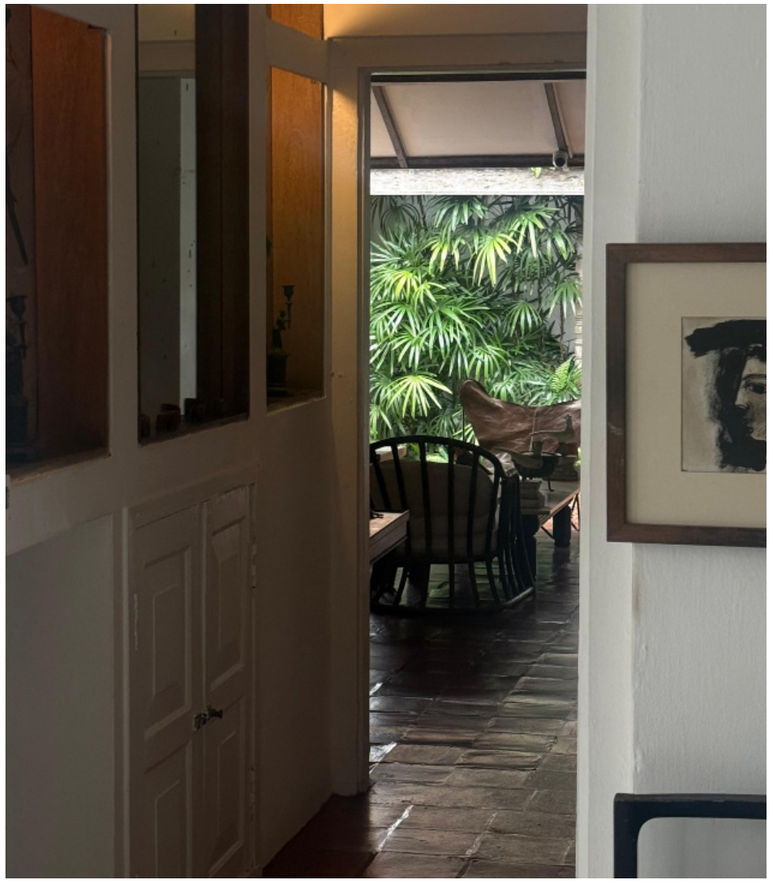
The house no.11 was composed out of four houses surrounded by the dense residential houses leaving less scope for the opening making it inward looking house where light comes from the top and various courtyards within houses which frames a view at various points.



In the house no.11 which was a domestic project for the bawa made on the acquired property where the circulation is layered and indirect, the movement unfolds through verandahs, courtyards and thresholds. Specific to house no.11 there is continuous shift in light, scale and openings. Where it follows some principles like axiality but specific to a space and every movement creates a surprise factor while opening to another courtyard or verandah or a terrace garden.

The movement of the house is axial, staggered at the points to offer different views which works as the pause points. The view in the image is aligned straight to be viewed from the bedroom. The windows were kept from floor to the roof which gives full view of the tree outside direct from the bed.

Entering House no.11 gives view of the water body framed through entrance creating a pause point before the entrance to the house on the way towards the water body there were two courtyards which helps in creating buffer between bedroom providing privacy in the bedroom and bringing in light in both spaces.

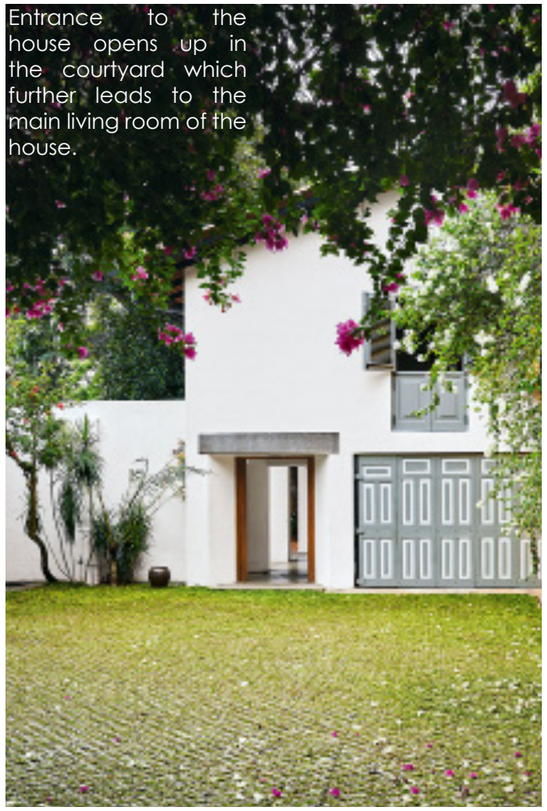


Moving right to the water body there is an entrance which provides view to the another verandah featuring other water body. This space is made to offer as small meeting space which is open ended to the verandah making it feel welcoming and close to the nature. Leaving no clue of the outer context, offering privacy with airy-open space.

The spaces here are wrapped around various courtyards which provides each space its individual identity without blending into other space. In order to go into another spaces there are specific ways like here the corridors.

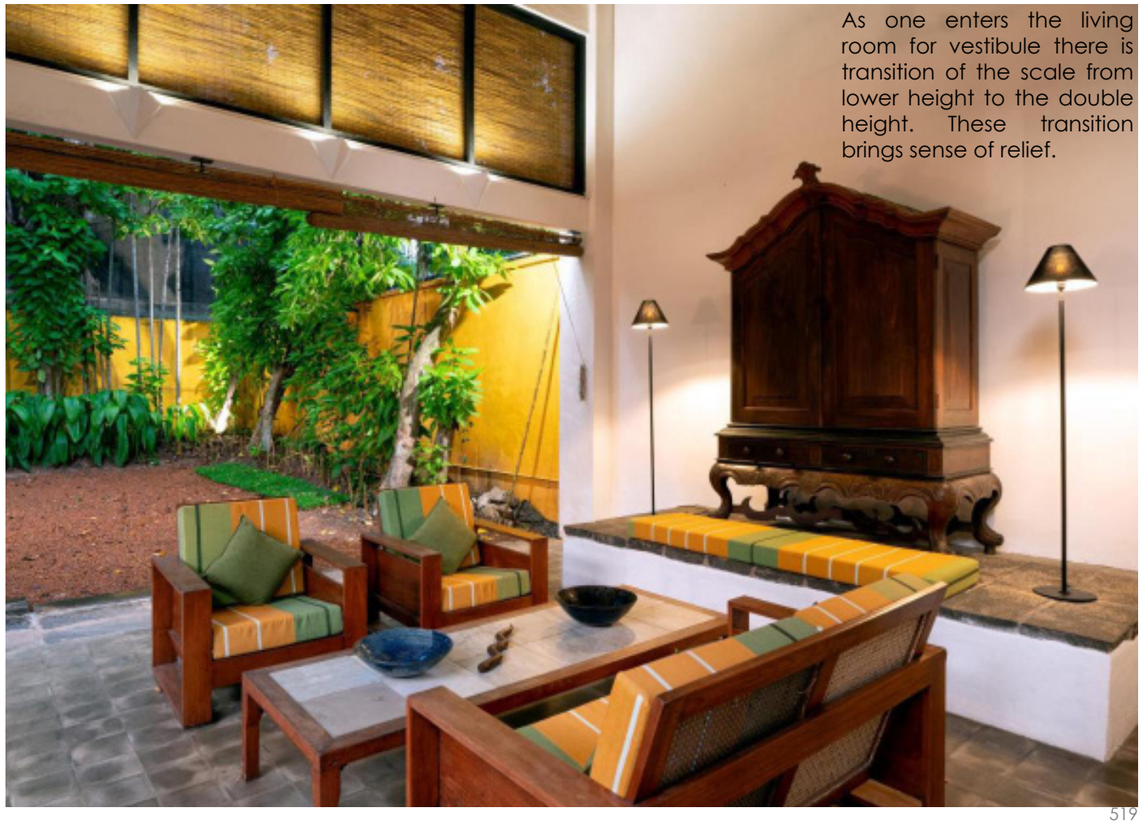
De Saram house

The De Saram House establishes a clearer public-to-private gradient, where circulation aligns with social etiquette and frames controlled views to the garden, making movement both spatially legible and socially coded. Elements like using double heights, colours and framing views helps in the movement here.



Entrance to the house opens up in the courtyard which further leads to the main living room of the house.

Here the scale factor plays a role where the vestibule is the lower in height and opens up in the double height through the frame with chamfered edges.



As one enters the living room for vestibule there is transition of the scale from lower height to the double height. These transition brings sense of relief.

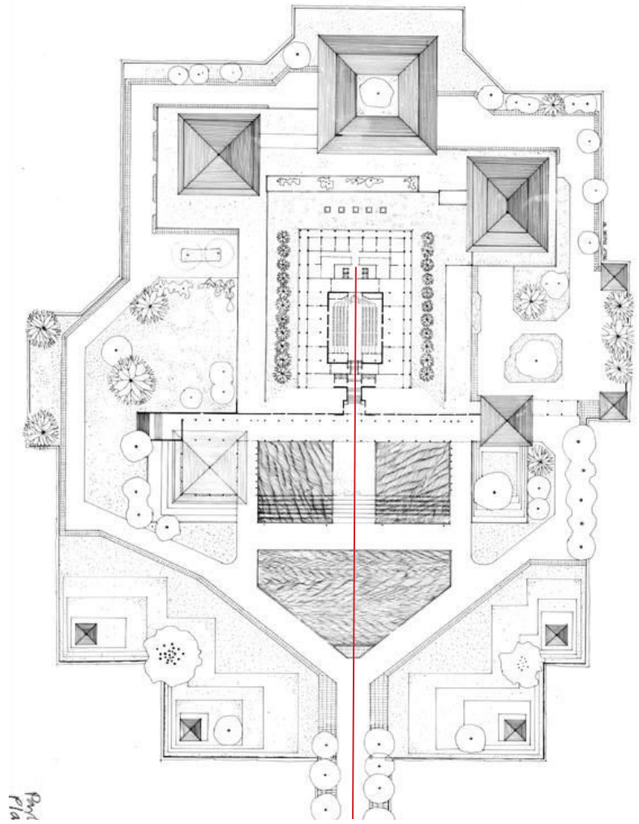
Parliament of Sri Lanka

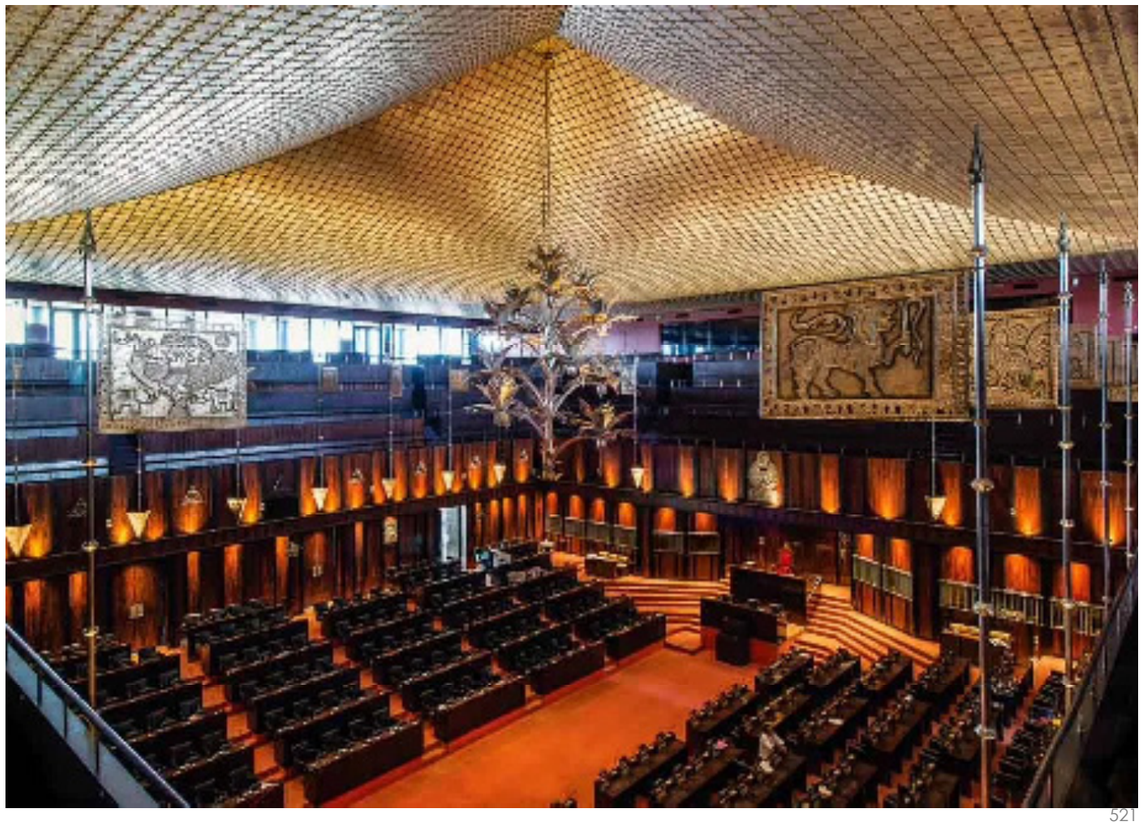
Parliament is one of a kind Bawa project of large scale, planning of the building is ceremonial and reflects history of the Sri Lanka. Use of the copper roof here indicates the importance of the building and the locating building between the lake increase the security of the building.

Planning of parliament is based on the simple grid and axis. The core of it is the house of Sri Lanka and surrounding it the offices and watch towers were placed.

The main core has the roof made from the aluminium plates stuck to the roof through copper hooks. These is placed such that it reflects the light from the upper windows and reflects it multiple time to offer soft light.

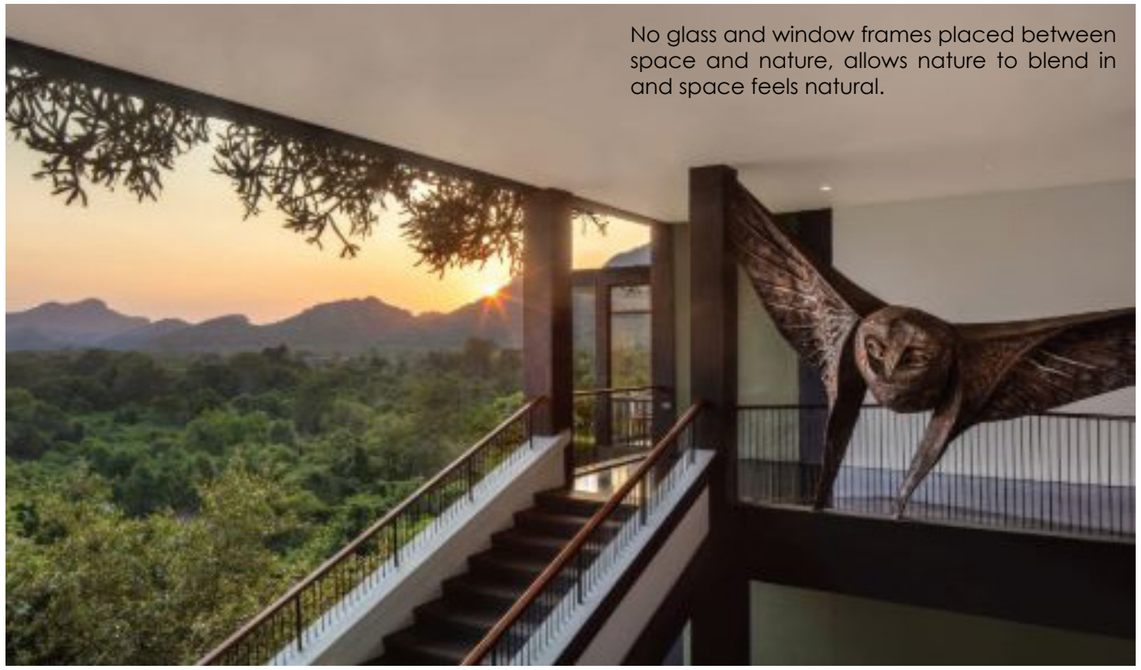
Like other Bawa projects this also shows axiality in framing view as the speaker seat is alligned to the road coming to the parliament.





Heritance Kandalama

Hotel Heritance Kandalama was made surrounding view of the Sygriya rock such that each room is aligned towards it. The hotel itself is covered with the green creepers which makes it blend with the surrounding and camouflage with nature.



No glass and window frames placed between space and nature, allows nature to blend in and space feels natural.

Nature was allowed to enter the building and be the part of the building. This gesture make the building to be grown out of nature and a part of it.

Bawa's desk at the hotel placed at a location where it captures a view of Sygria along with the water-body and natural scape. The project provide most importance to the view compared to the space itself.

Jetwing Lighthouse

Jetwing Lighthouse is a hotel made along the seashore provides a leisure of sunsets at the horizon. Also, some spaces like the rooftop dinning space feels independent feature from the whole building and offers the ambience of the tropical Sri Lankan architecture which has waterbody with courtyard.

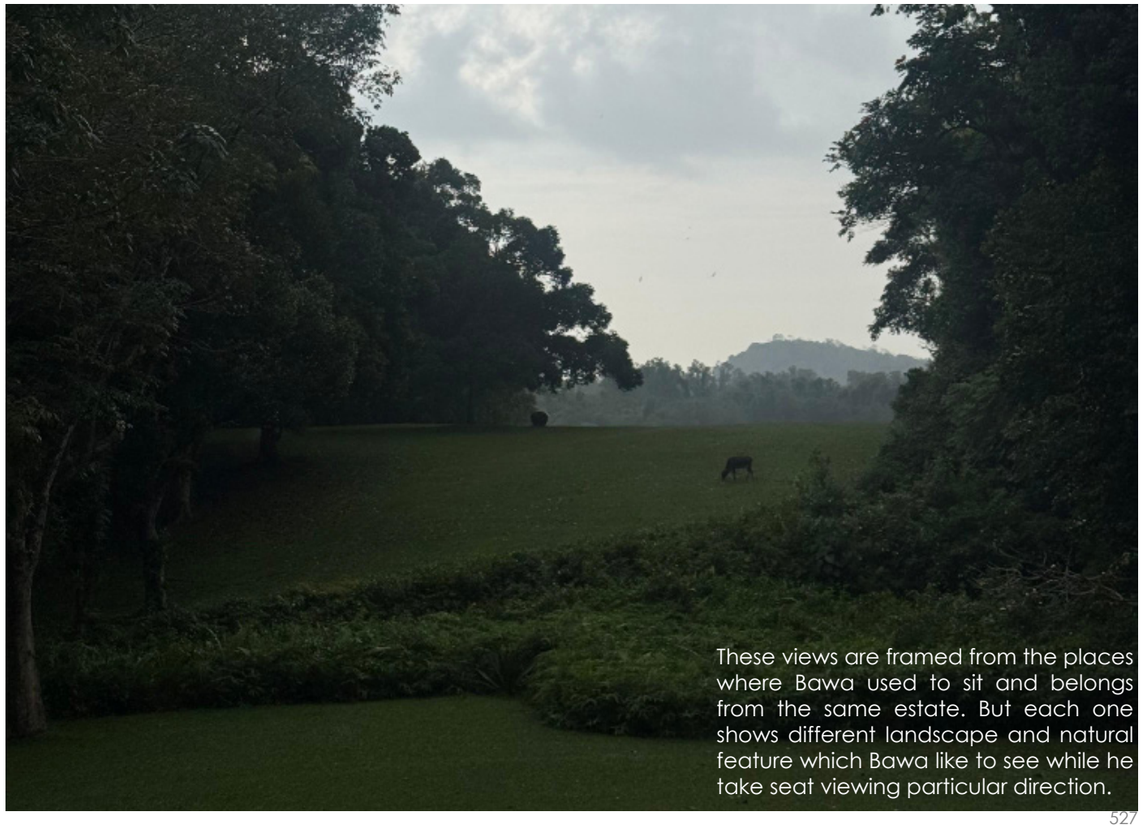
The hotel in itself is a simple grid structure of concrete with continuous rows of room, but as you move towards the terrace dinning space it ramps up than the usual level. Before entering the particular area the transitional frame is small and give a glimpse to change of the scale. And as you enter the space it totally feels as ground floor of tropical houses like De Saram and House no.11 .

Lunuganga

Lunuganga estate was cinnamon and rubber plantation bought by Bawa, to build a space with different space zones which represent different landscapes. Each landscape here provides different view according to different time of the day.

A water body near the paddy plantation framed to be a farm land of Sri Lanka.

A Verticle window in the office of the Bawa similar to the House no.11.



These views are framed from the places where Bawa used to sit and belongs from the same estate. But each one shows different landscape and natural feature which Bawa like to see while he take seat viewing particular direction.

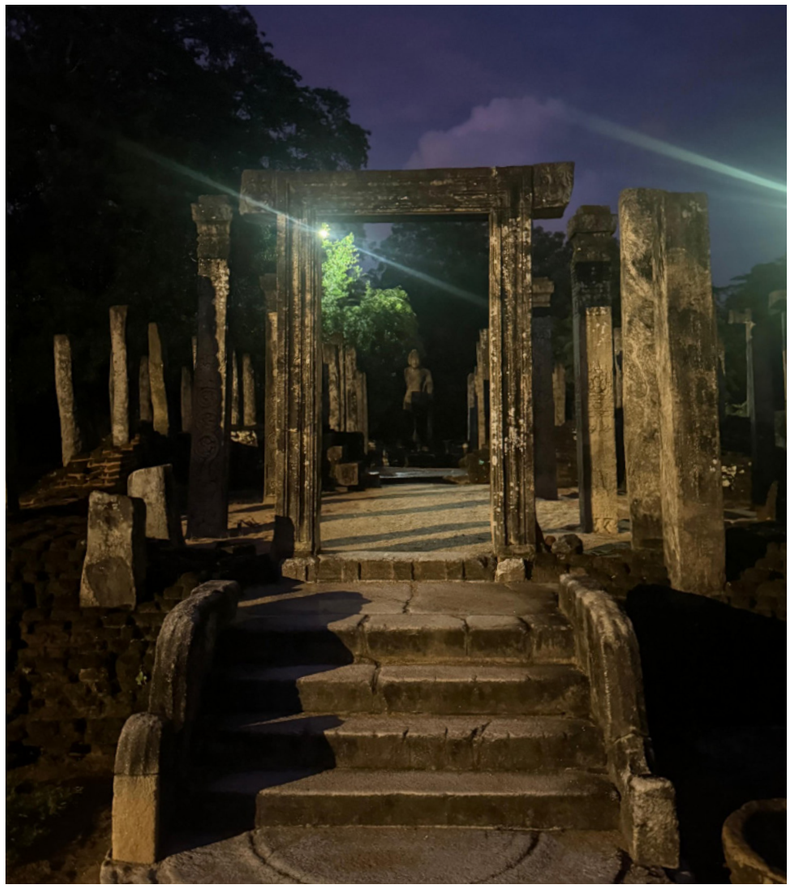
Anuradhapuram

Anuradhapura supposed to be a historical site where the buddhist monks used to stay and worship buddha. These stupas are made high and the monks way of worship and movement is disciplined and straight forward.

The reminiscent of the older buildings shows the larger repetition of members and an axial alignment of them, represents a discipline and a simple reflection of monk life in the structure. Thus, it affect the movement in the structure.

Polonnaruwa

After Anuradhapuram this is the second capital of buddhism where the monks used to stay, preach and practice their rituals. Polonnaruwa shows similar characteristics as it.



The buildings here shows very possessional movement along with the disciplined arrangement of the spaces.

Buildings were connected through a axial ways which shows no tweak in them and reflects simple and subtle way of living. Unlike Bawa's architecture where every space is personalized and made according to the one's need.

06

MEMORIES

Group VI
Chinmay Soni, Pragya Chopra, Sanjay T P, Surabhi Patil

Being neighbouring countries, India and Sri Lanka share quite a few commonalities that can be observed through the lens of architecture, landscape and culture. From the very first house we visited, we felt a sense of familiarity. Even though the four of us come from different parts of India, many spaces reminded us of places we already knew. This journey showed us that architecture is not just about buildings, but about memories, how spaces are felt through the body, surroundings, and daily use. Elements like verandahs, courtyards, light, and materials felt familiar because they respond to climate and ways of living common to South Asia. As we moved through houses, cities, and landscapes, places like Anuradhapura felt less like planned cities and more like lived, sacred environments shaped by paths, water, trees, and rituals. Even the structure of buildings showed thoughtful responses to land and climate. Together, these experiences helped us understand how architecture becomes something lived, remembered, and shaped over time.

06a

From Buildings to Cities

Pragya Chopra | PUM25426

When I began visiting Geoffrey Bawa's works, I felt a bit out of place, as I couldn't immediately look at it through an architect's lens. I was struggling to understand what I was supposed to observe or feel. However, after visiting a few of Geoffrey Bawa's sites, my perspective slowly began to change, and I started experiencing the spaces rather than just looking at them.

What I mainly noticed in all of Bawa's works is that he does not design generic buildings that could be placed anywhere on a site. Instead, each building feels as though it truly belongs to its location, blending seamlessly with the surrounding nature and landscape of that place.

Bawa's architecture responds gently to the climate through light, breeze, and shade, blurring the boundary between inside and outside. The spaces feel alive, not imposed, designed to be lived in rather than just observed.

"As the built form fades, the body reconnects with landscape, evoking calm, grounded, mountain-like memories."

"I imagined if rain arrives, ripples form, sound deepens, and memory shifts to monsoon land-scapes where water, light, and time slow the body into calm reflection."

"This corridor follows the natural rock and slope, allowing terrain to shape structure rather than be erased by it.
Movement becomes slow and tactile, blurring the boundary between building and mountain landscape."

Kandalama

By Geoffery Bawa

When I visited Kandalama, the experience felt very personal to me. I am a mountain person, and the sense of relief and calm I usually feel while traveling in the Himalayas came back strongly here. Walking through the resort did not feel like being inside a building at all it felt like moving through a landscape. I naturally slowed down, paused often, and became more aware of the trees, rocks, water, and changing light around me. Just like in the mountains, where the terrain shapes how you move and pause, Kandalama made me feel grounded, calm, and deeply connected to the place.

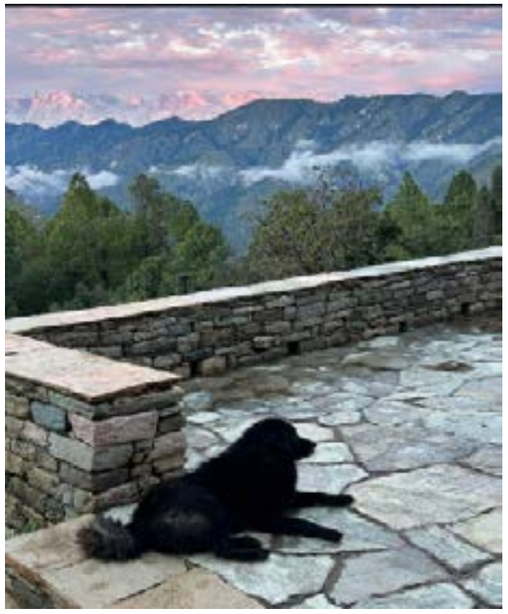
Unfolding Memories

It offers a constantly shifting visual experience..

As one walks through corridors and open spaces, the landscape is revealed gradually framed by structure, filtered by vegetation, and transformed by changing light, wind, and time of day. Rather than fixing views, moments of seeing, allowing climate and terrain to guide what is revealed and when.

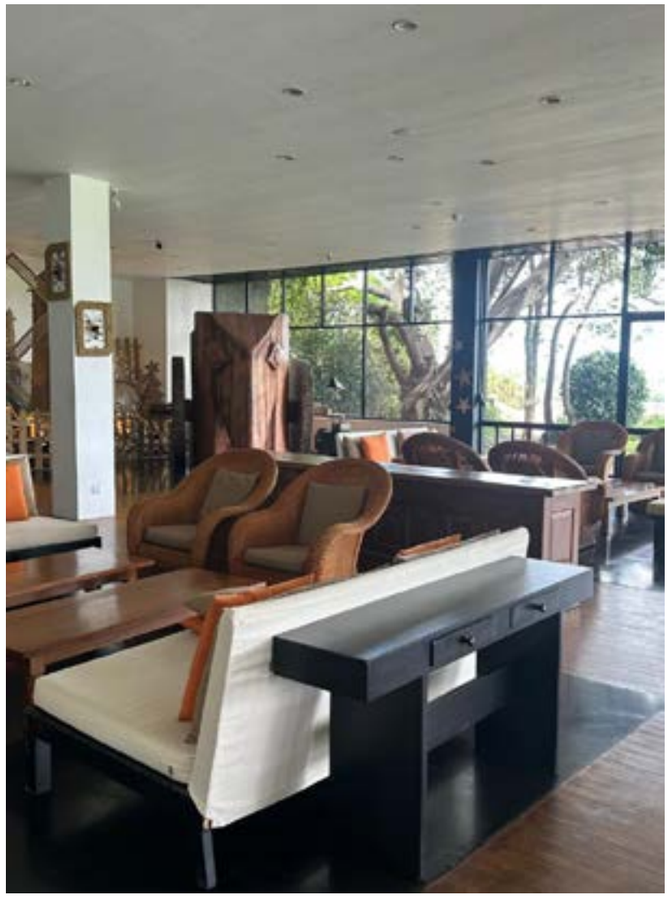
"This clearing opens the journey outward, where architecture withdraws, and the landscape takes over in Kandalama."

"Shakti Prana in Uttarakhand, which blends into the hillside with wide views of distant mountain ranges and forests, open terraces, similar to how water and trees frame views at Kandalama."



Unfolding Memories

Neither Inside nor Outside



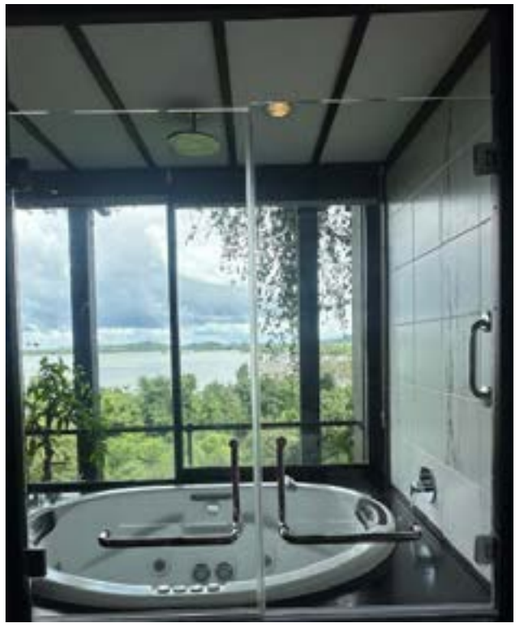
KANDALAMA

"The dim light, silence, and framed views create a sensory experience and deeply connected to rest and contemplation rather than activity."

SHAKTI PRANA

"The climate-responsive design cool interiors, natural materials, and soft daylight creates a similar feeling of calm and retreat in Kandalama."

KANDALAMA



"The placement of the bath near large openings creates a heightened moment of transition between inside and outside."

SHAKTI PRANA

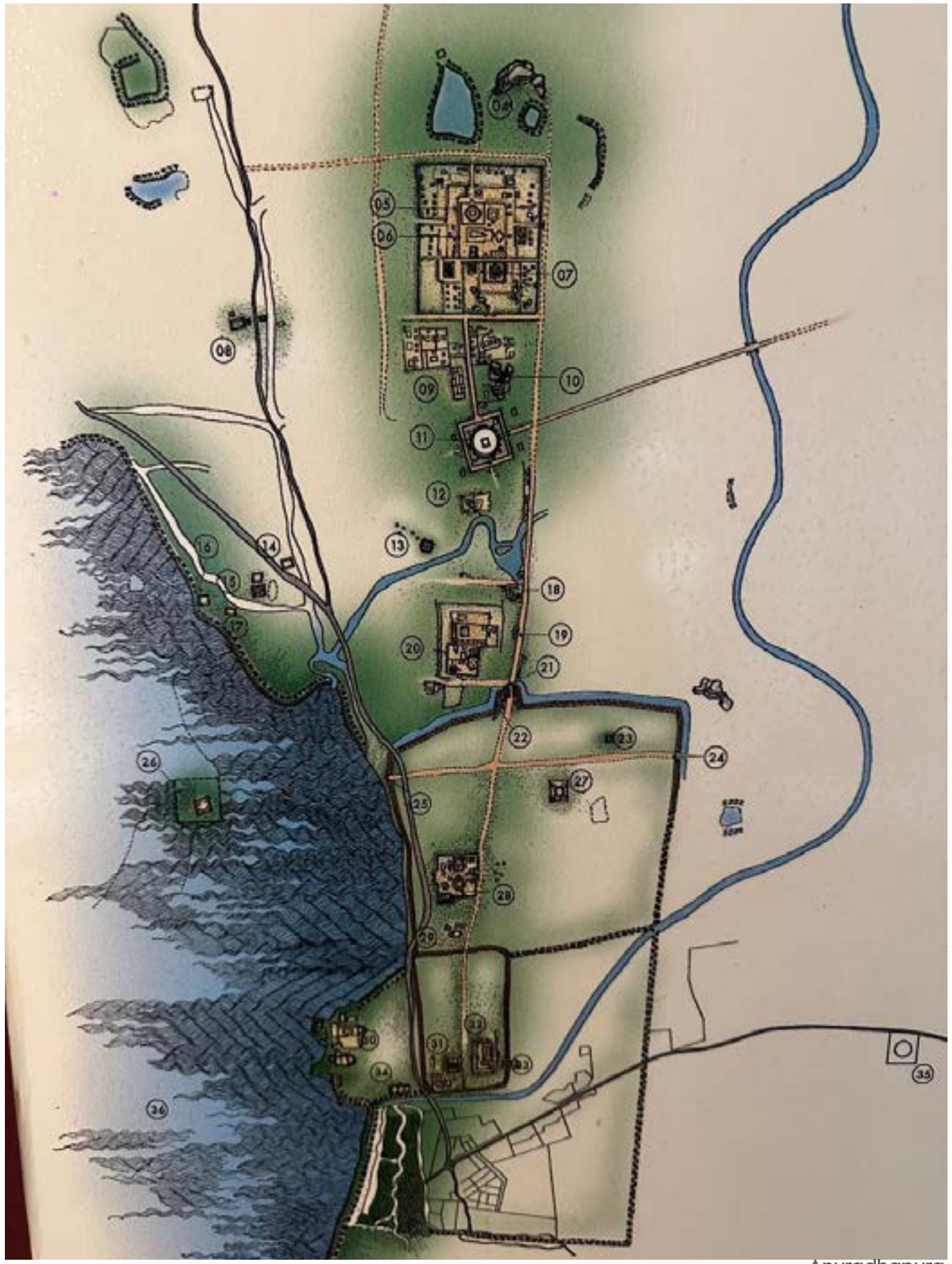
"In both, the bathroom is not treated as a closed utility space but as a sensory pause."

"Open corridors, deep overhangs, and cross-ventilated spaces allow humidity, breeze, sound, and vegetation to flow through the architecture. The building almost disappears into the jungle, making inside and outside indistinguishable."

The Stark Difference

Kandalama merges with its climate through openness, while Shakti Prana engages its landscape through enclosure, both terrain-led, but climatically opposite.

" It is selectively enclosed by thicker walls, compact volumes, and controlled openings. Architecture is articulated with clear edges, white walls, and terraces remain visually legible against the forest."



Anuradhapura

Anuradhapura

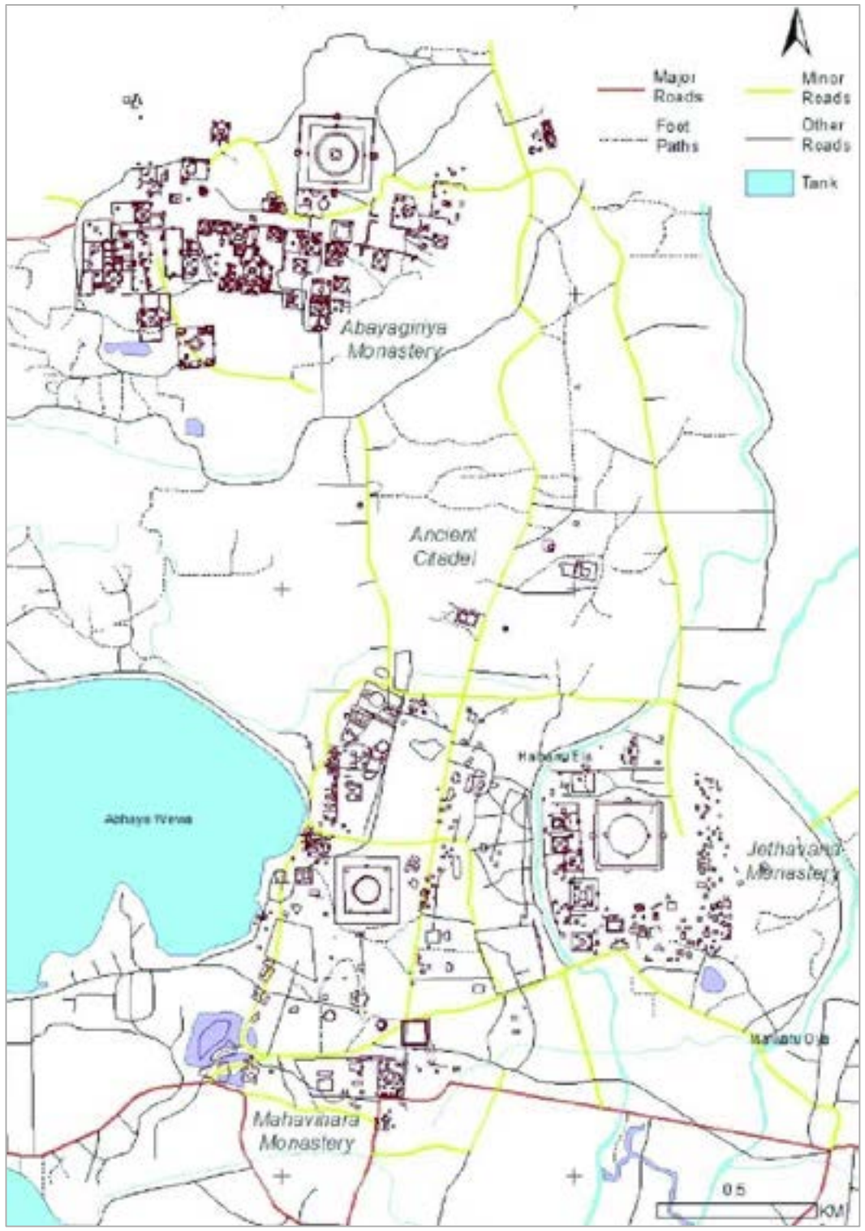
4th century BCE to 10th century CE

It was during my visit to Anuradhapura, the earlier capital where my urban planning perspective truly came into place. it didn't feel like entering a city in the usual sense, especially not like many tightly gated or clearly bounded ancient cities I have seen in India, like Amritsar or Shahjanabad.
Instead, it felt like stepping into a sacred landscape that slowly unfolded as I moved through it. Everything was spread out, large stupas appearing in the distance, quiet monasteries, trees, twin lakes, and huge water tanks woven into the terrain. The space itself encouraged calm. There were no sharp edges or tight streets.
From an urban planning perspective, it felt like a low-density, open city, where nature, water, and built form flowed together. The experience was peaceful and continuous, making me feel small, yet deeply connected to something spiritual

Similar in Essence, Ritual Movement, Blurred Boundaries and Cosmology

Anuradhapura

Node-based sacred landscape



"30–40 major Buddhist stupas 3 major tanks in city + 1,000+ tanks and reservoirs" remain visually legible against the forest."

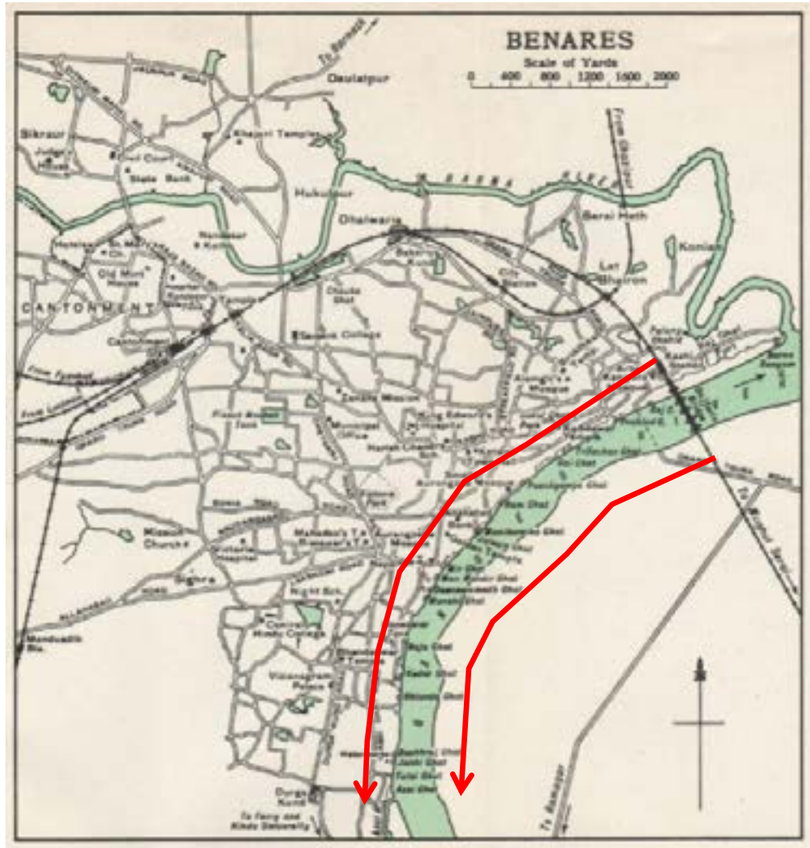
"Axial/processional movement between stupas"

"Spread-out sacred sites encourage ritual movement and pilgrimage circuits, like Varanasi's ghats along the river."

"Distributed tank-based hydraulic system."

Varanasi

Linear sacred axis



"1,500+ temples and 84–88 ghats"

"Ritual river-to-core pedestrian and boat movement"

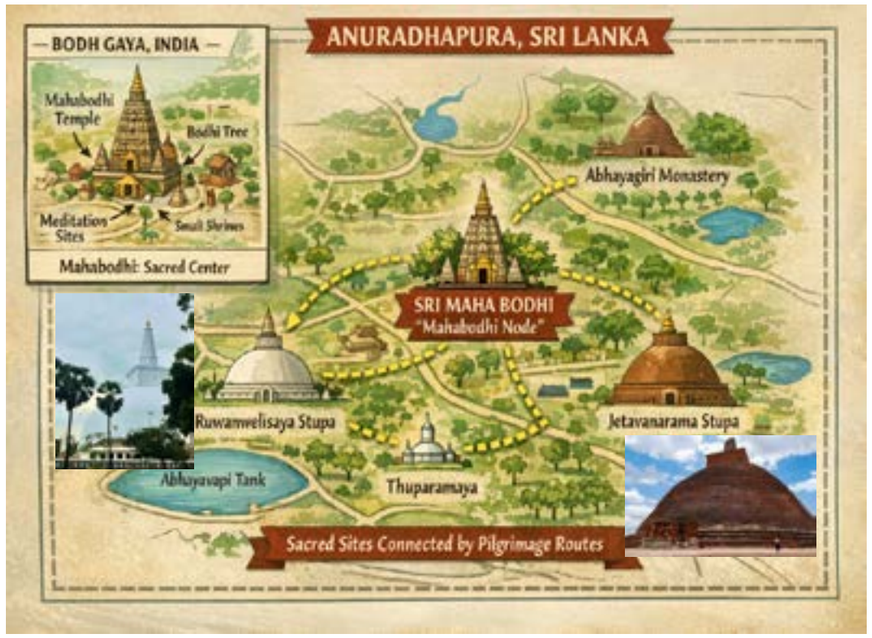
"Single linear river system"

"Both cities emphasize slow movement and contemplation."

Religion Integrated Into Everyday Urban Life

Water structures the urban experience tanks in Anuradhapura and the Ganga in Varanasi regulate microclimate, rituals, and daily movement. In both, the city is perceived through ritual paths, pedestrian dominance, shaded edges, sacred trees, and a slow, contemplative rhythm, creating a timeless spiritual atmosphere rather than a formally planned one.

Anuradhapura

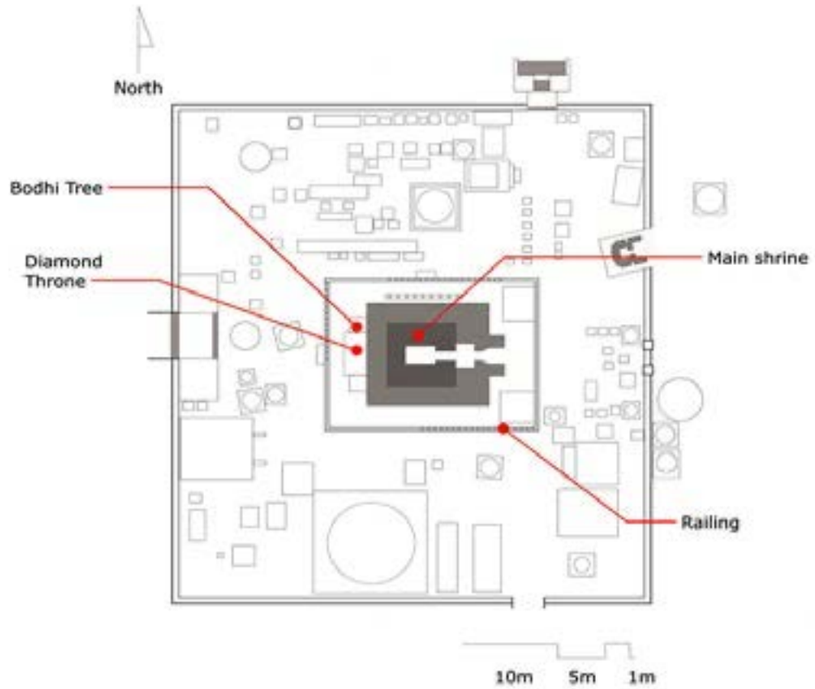


"Extended ritual movement across the landscape"

"Pilgrims move between Sri Maha Bodhi, Ruwanwelisaya, Jetavanaramaya, and Thuparamaya."

"Sri Maha Bodhi (sapling from Bodh Gaya) becomes the symbolic continuation of Enlightenment."

Bodh Gaya



"Bodhi Tree marks the exact point of Enlightenment."

"Compact circumambulatory paths"

From Sacred Node to Sacred Network

Both Bodh Gaya and Anuradhapura offer a calm, introspective experience shaped by shade, water, and open spaces that slow movement and soften the tropical climate. BodhGaya is a compact, monocentric sacred core centered on the Bodhi Tree, while Anuradhapura unfolds as a vast, polycentric sacred landscape where memory forms through continuous ritual movement. From an urban planning perspective, Bodh Gaya functions as a focused ritual precinct, whereas Anuradhapura operates as a climate-responsive sacred urban system integrating worship and water infrastructure.

06b

SILENT ECHOES

Surabhi Patil

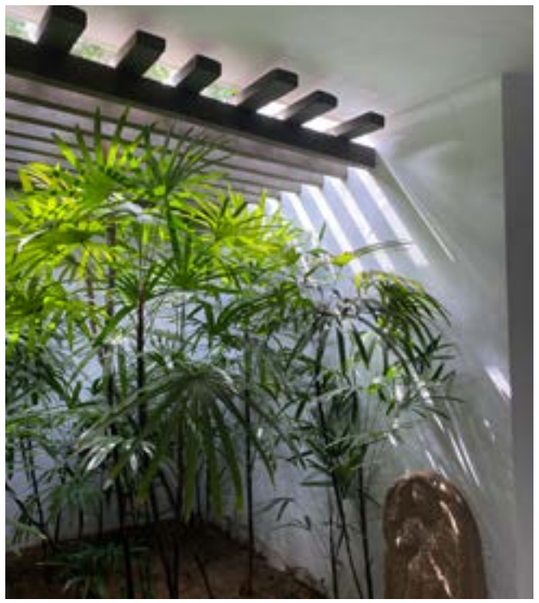
Space is first understood, not as geometry, but as a feeling. Walking slowly into House no. 11, across the quiet, cooling underlay, the sunlight from the courtyard fell softly on limbs like a memory resurfacing.

Even as a child, the smell of earth after rain, the rustling of leaves, and the sensation of the grain of timber beneath one's fingers are what have stayed longer than the form itself. It is believed that architecture lives in the body first and only later in the mind, that intuition is shaped by the remembered textures, movements, and sounds.

Between the inside and outside, verandahs and walkways, across hallways of unfolding light and channels of soft echoes, memories of playing and running across my mother's childhood house were invigorated. Walking through Kandalama and Lunuganga, the paths curved along rock and foliage, revealing the landscape in fragments.

THE FALLEN FRANGIPANI

At the threshold, a fallen frangipani is noticed and instinctively picked up, its delicate presence and faint fragrance recalling a memory of earlier encounters with the tree elsewhere. This act, a simple one, evoked a pattern of recognition, as if the space is already connected to a personal past before its architecture is consciously comprehended. An emotional continuity between the lived memory and the house is thereby manifested.



HOUSE 11

The slow accumulation of textures and sensory cues reiterates a memory, a sequence of surfaces unveiling to invite touch and attention. The study overlooking the courtyard becomes a particularly enduring moment.

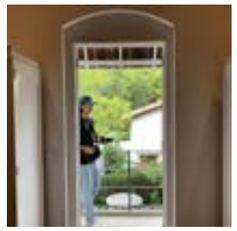
The transition from one space to another with the faint sound of water dripping in the courtyard curates the perception of a constant, rhythmic presence, echoing lightly against the surrounding walls.

FRAMES FROM THE PAST

Standing at the edge of the house, the air felt thick with pause, as if sound slowly lingered in the walls.

Memory alludes through an atmosphere of silence that appears to have absorbed the past sounds. Here, sound and memory interlude to frame a layer of time.

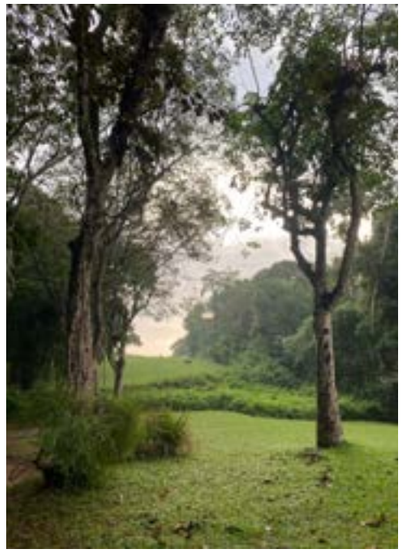
DE SARAM HOUSE



Another particular moment is reminisced through a window that frames a figure beyond it, a person immersed in oneself, suspended within the view. This framed image came across as an emotional register more than a visual composition, evoking a memory of an act of escaping from reality; of being momentarily elsewhere while still remaining inside the space.

THE SOUND OF RAIN

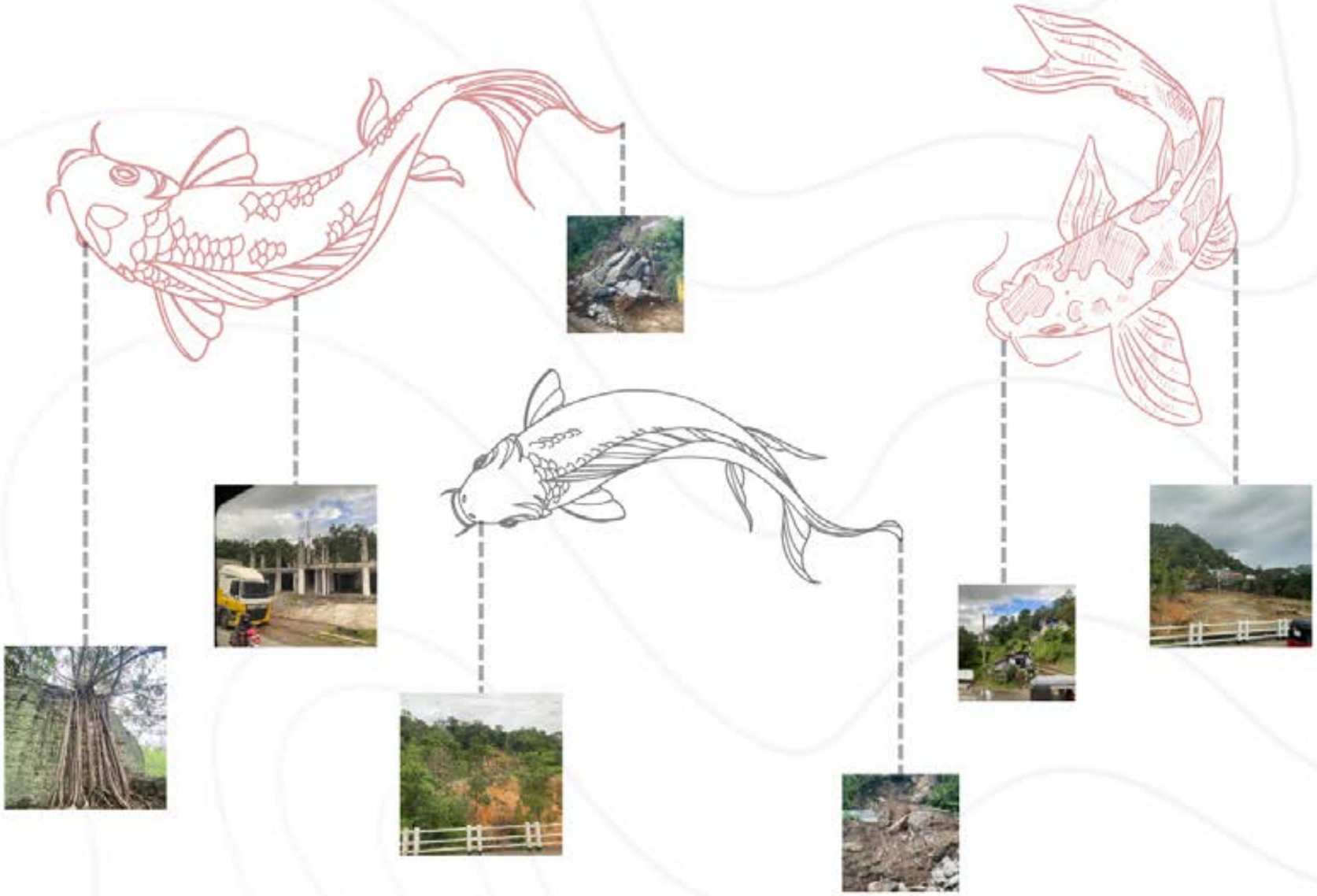
Meandering across the contours, endless vegetation emerging with every step taken, the landscape here feels both distant and deeply familiar. The presence of jackfruit trees, cinnamon plants, and flowering shrubs evokes a memory from one's native place, where trees once marked the seasons, fragrance, and everyday routines. Vegetation is perceived as a trigger for layered memory: the smell of ripening fruit, the rough texture of bark, and the quiet association of ancestral yards.



LUNUGANGA

An unexpected downpour transformed the site, inviting the body into a moment of involuntary respite. From a covered walkway, the site is observed as the landscape darkens, the ground softens and raindrops begin to cascade from the gentle slope. In that moment, the place feels suspended in time, the sound of rain against the leaves and the stone shifting the site into yet another passing memory-in-the-making. Water momentarily redefines the space, atmosphere and perception.

The interaction of the land with the lake inspires yet another dialogue with water. Moulding the site into three terraces to adapt to the shifting water levels, the calibrated edges of the pathways reveal a landscape that embraces rather than resists. The estate thereby becomes a living terrain shaped by vegetation, water and spatial memory.



Passing through Kandy's historic centre, one could experience reflections of their own memories of the Indian landscape of hills, markets and layered histories, where the natural and built coexist uneasily yet beautifully.

The bus ride from Sigiriya to Kandy and from Kandy to Bentota became yet another narrative- changing rooflines, shifting terrains, traces of landslides and floods etched into the land. It seemed incontestable not to read climate as a chronicle here, a parallel to one's own country's vulnerability, adaptation, and a quiet void of knowing and understanding indigenous wisdom.

Towards the end of the spatial journey of fourteen days, the scale shifted again. Memories, anecdotes, images and routes began to connect these fragments- touch, movement and territory- revealing that the story of space is also a narrative of journey, memory and climate woven together.

A QUIET RETURN

Sanjay T P

As an architect from the southern part of India, arriving in Sri Lanka did not feel like entering a foreign land, it felt like a quiet return. Through the lens of interior design and architecture, the climate, the materials, and the way spaces were formed and experienced created an instant familiarity. The warm air, the play of light and shade, the textures underfoot, and the seamless transitions between inside and outside all echoed ways of building and living I had grown up with. What I encountered was not a new architectural language, but a shared one rooted in climate, culture, and everyday life.

06c

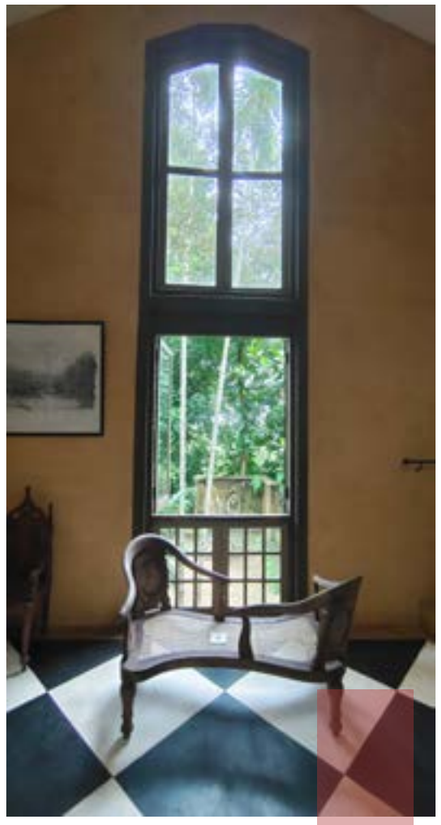
De Saram House

As i entered the De Saram House, the building spoke a language I already knew. Deep verandahs, shaded corridors, and semi open intermediate spaces echoed **Pondicherry's colonial interiors,** where inside and outside blur gently. The softness of light, filtered through wooden screens and clay tiles, carried the calm of **Ooty's hillside bungalows,** where architecture slows time and invites pause. The courtyards, pitched roofs, and tactile materials resonated strongly with **Kerala,** where space is shaped as much by monsoon, wind, and spaces shaped by everyday living, not just walls.

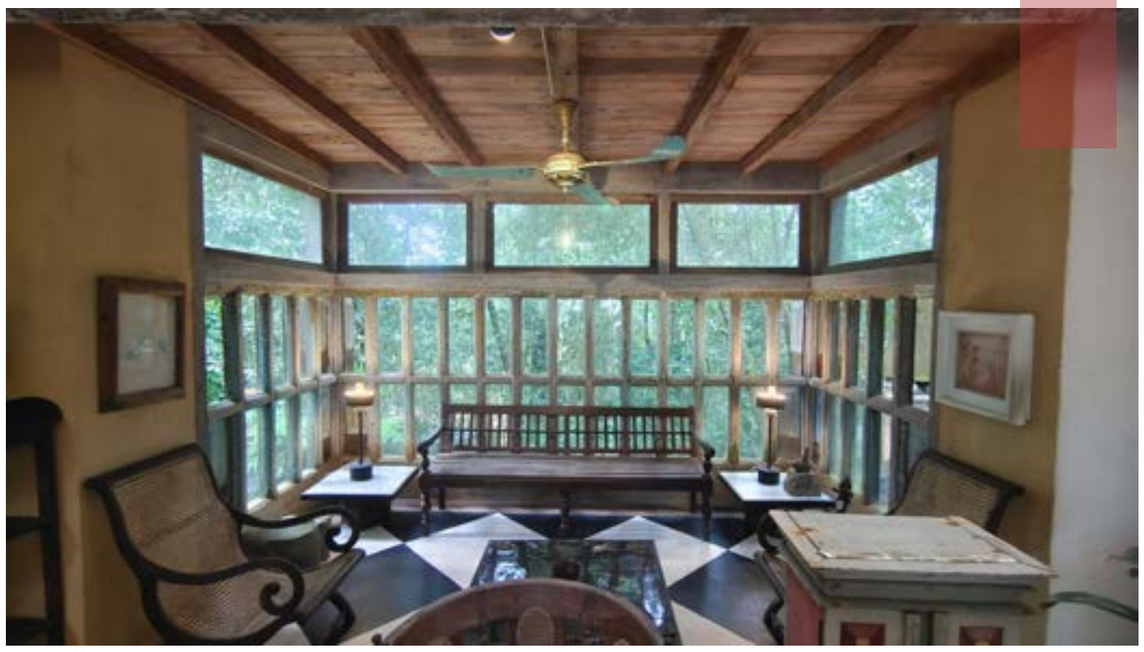
The interior: The furnitures and built in pieces recall heavy, locally crafted timber furniture that feels permanent and lived in. The flooring and circulation areas, along with high ceilings and exposed pitched roofs, were designed for comfort, ventilation, and everyday living rather than ornamentation. This resonates with the typical design of **colonial hill bungalows of Ooty**.

Lunuganga

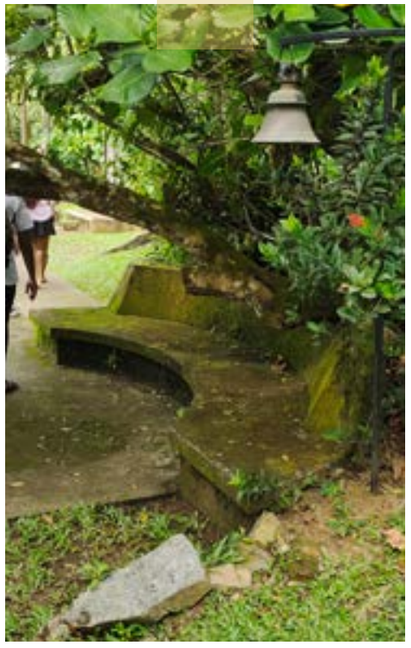
Sri Lanka's tropical modern buildings don't feel copied. The Lunuganga feels like a natural way of building forms that has grown from local knowledge of climate and lifestyle. The interiors are open and breathable because of the semi open spaces, allowing aeration, lighting, and ease of movement. Cool floors, textured walls, and well-placed openings make the outdoors feel like part of the inside, creating spaces that are comfortable, social, and age beautifully(weathering of materials).



Interior of Lunuganga



Blends tropical wilderness with formal design



Landscape of Lunuganga

House Number 11

What stood out to me was how simple and calm the spaces were not because they lacked design, but because simplicity was chosen.The beauty of House Number 11 sprang from its proportions, the well sized rooms, with high ceilings, thick walls, complemented with well placed openings.

Comfort was derived from rooms that received ample amounts of natural lighting, fresh air flow through cross ventilation, shaded areas that protected from the sun, rather than relying on air conditioning.

Luxury was derived from the ease of comfortable living in the place, cool floors in buildings that provided relief from the sun's heating effects, areas that would allow social interactions through seating, in addition to spaces whose transition was natural from inside to outside.

At the same time, old colonial ideas were thoughtfully adapted to local climate, materials, and ways of living, instead of being copied or erased.

This journey reaffirmed a belief I carry into my practice: in the tropics, architecture is not about control, but coexistence. Sri Lanka did not feel unfamiliar because our regions share a deeper lineage of climate led design, social spaces, and interiors that feel lived in, not designed.

06d

STRUCTURAL SILENCE

Chinmay soni

As a structural engineering student, the visits showed that most of the structural systems adopted at the visited sites were quite like those normally followed in India. But when these systems get blended with architectural intent, the structural behavior and design philosophy become far more insightful. At the Sri Lanka Parliament, during our visit, we saw a conventional beam–column junction system; a lot of conventionally similar structural aspects to normal reinforced concrete construction are there. But the most interesting was the symmetry of this building in the structural viewpoint. The front façade has been designed in such a way that any differential settlement or abnormal structural behavior causing one side to sink lower than the other would be visibly noticed. This acts as an early warning mechanism that draws the attention of people to potential structural issues at an early stage.

No flushing of beam-column-roof

Column placement'

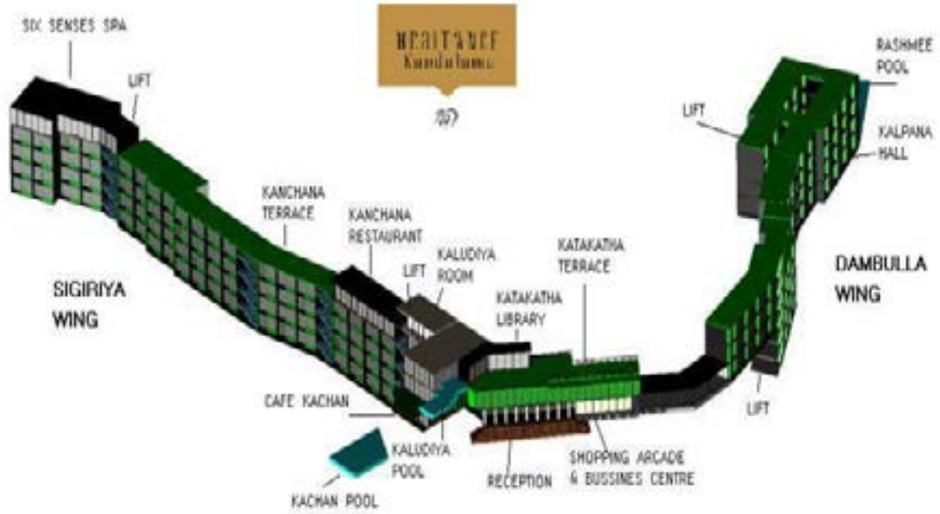
- What Was Not Built
- Columns Not Placed.
- Ground Not Cut.
- Rocks Not Removed.
- Paths Not Blocked.

` HERITANCE KANDALAMA

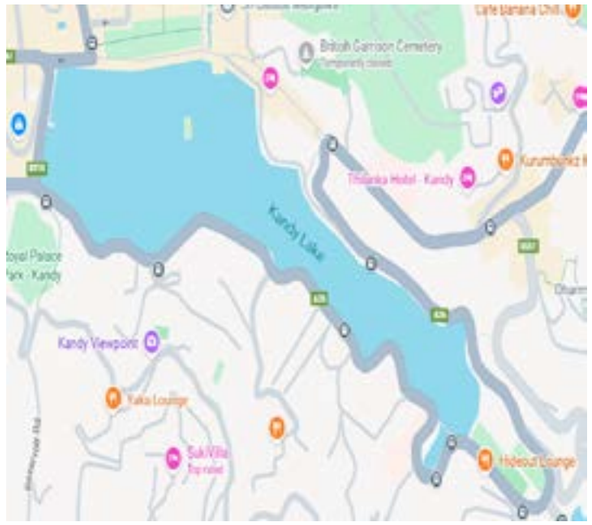
Udaipur has been an aquatic city from my earliest recollections. Udaipur initially grew out of the periphery of Fateh Sagar Lake and as such, it was intimately bound to the lake's shoreline with respect to the activities of daily living. As the pace of the development of Udaipur increased, the urban sprawl of Udaipur has pushed the core of the city further away from the Fagan, and commercial, vehicle traffic, and the construction of newer buildings farther away from the shoreline, creating a fracture in the continuity between the historical identity of Udaipur and the urban experience.

Kandy is another example of a city formed by an aquatic environment and yet has developed differently. Kandy's geography and urban organisation are still based on the Kandy Lake. Major roads, public amenities, and all major city buildings have been constructed parallel to the lake. Whereas Udaipur has had its relationship with its lake deteriorate due to urban sprawl, Kandy continues to identify with the Kandy Lake as the central determinative factor in Kandy's urban structure.

MEMORIES WITH KANDY AND UDAIPUR



HERITANCE KANDALAMA



KANDY LAKE- SRI LANKA

FATEH SAGAR LAKE UDAIPUR

Besides, the use of large quantities of timber in the roofing system is worth mentioning. The wooden roof structure has been designed very much appreciating the concept of load distribution; how it would behave in transmitting loads with architectural elegance for durability.

Kandy seems to me a beautiful combination of Mt. Abu and Udaipur. The hilly surroundings with a pleasant climate are just like Mt. Abu, which gives the city a peaceful atmosphere. Still, by its entity of Kandy Lake reminds one of Udaipur, where the lake provides a central point for increasing the scenic and cultural importance of the city. Overall, Kandy is the city that seamlessly integrates nature, culture, and built structures into one, providing tranquil grounds similar to Mount Abu, yet possessing in the lake and its surroundings a scenic charm reminiscent of Udaipur.

Overall, all these sites represent how well-developed structural design, together with architectural vision, can yield safety, efficiency, and friendliness towards nature.

- Vertical section
- Column starting and stopping at one level
- Natural rock restrained but not penetrated

Wildlife not disturbed
Made the strucure in 2 parts

- **Sigiriya wing**
- **Dambulla wing**

Sigiriya wing

Dambulla wing

Wildlife Separation w.r.t. Natural Movment wildlife

At Heritance Kandalama, designed by Geoffrey Bawa, the structure was integrated with nature marvelously. At the structural level, the building stands on isolated foundations for a firm, solid base while allowing the ground to take care of its uneven rocky face. The columns are placed judiciously to avoid cutting the natural mountain and disturbing the landscape that was already there. Significantly, the ground floor is left almost free, letting the wildlife cross without a barrier-a constructional sensitivity combined with environmental concern. This practice of gradually reducing the column sizes at higher levels is an effective design strategy from a cost-effectiveness point of view, unlike the practice in India where, under normal conditions, sizes of columns are generally maintained throughout. Use of flat slab roofing system allows larger column-to-column spans, enhancing spatial flexibility. There is also a column provided only at a specific floor level in one part of the restaurant. The column has been cleverly located to restrain a natural rock growth without allowing or extending itself through the entire structure, which would have created structural hazards while hindering the natural settings.

07

Between Life & Architecture

Reading Bawa Through his Works

Group 7

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Geoffrey Bawa's architecture is best understood not as a single idea or fixed approach, but as a body of work shaped gradually by circumstance, experience, and place. This compilation approaches his practice through the overlaps between his life and architecture, where personal tendencies, evolving relationships, and changing contexts quietly influence design decisions over time.

Rather than reading his work as a linear progression, the projects are examined as moments within a longer, layered journey of living, building and adapting. The four narratives within this compilation operate across different lenses and scales, yet remain interlinked. Together, they move from life to space, tracing how architecture becomes a medium through which personal values are negotiated and tested.

From an overarching life trajectory, to House 11 as an evolving project shaped through incremental spatial reworking alongside personal growth, to the creation of intimate and protective spaces allowing withdrawal from public gaze, and finally his inclination towards solitude and privacy, expressed differently in two residences, each study reveals a distinct facet of Bawa's thinking. Read collectively, these studies reveal an architecture that does not announce itself at once, but is understood gradually through movement, time and use.

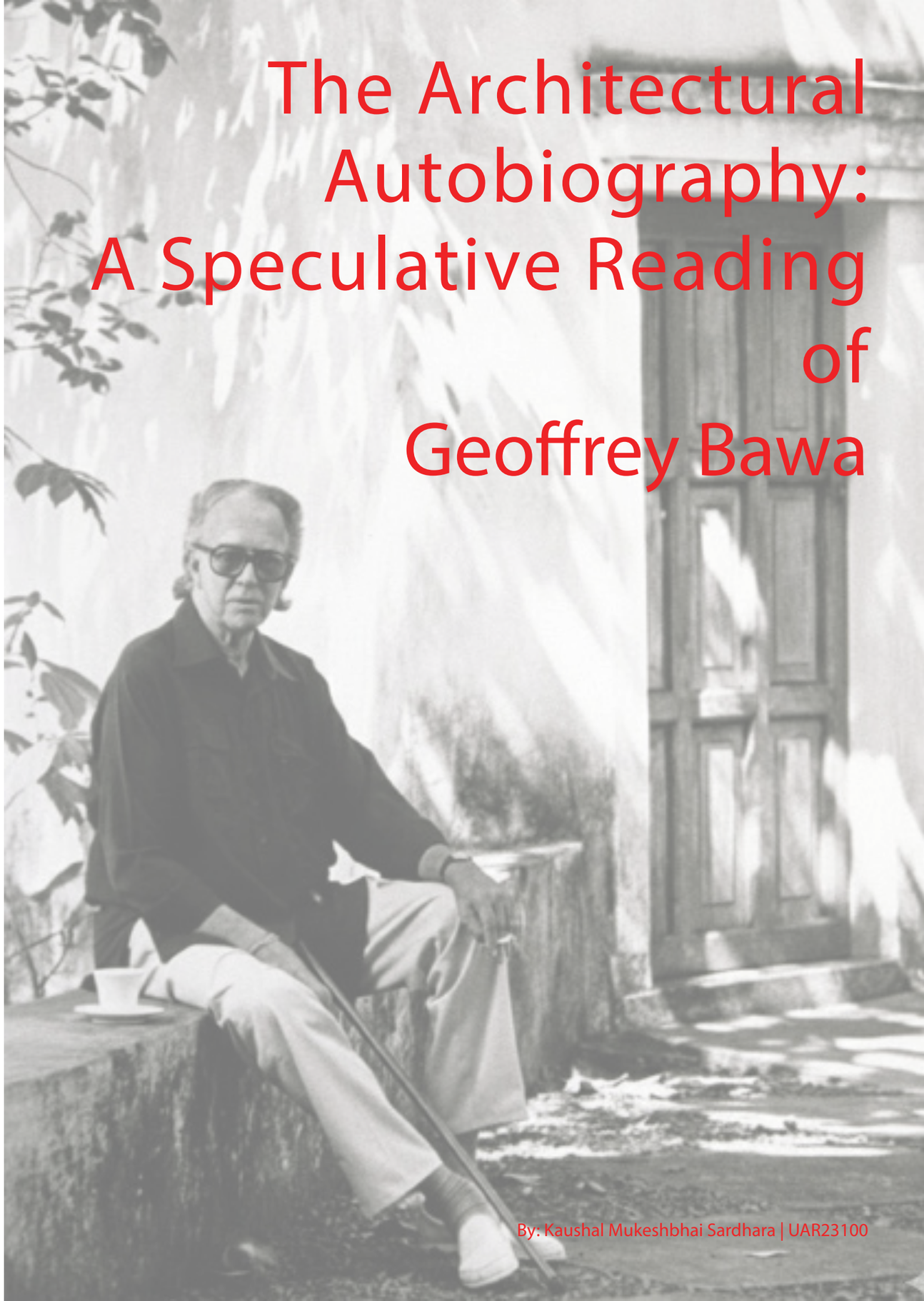
07a

The Architectural Autobiography: A speculative Reading of Geoffrey Bawa

Kaushal M Sardhara | UAR23100

Geoffrey Bawa's architectural legacy is often celebrated as the pinnacle of Tropical Modernism. However, a deeper reading of his work suggests a more profound purpose: his structures may be seen as a physical diary of a man navigating the complexities of identity, displacement, and desire. This essay explores Bawa's evolution from what might be termed a "drifting observer"—defined by a restless, pre-architectural search for belonging—to a master of the "wall-less jungle." By analyzing his trajectory from the vertical, detached forms of his early career to the horizontal, earth-bound sanctuaries of his maturity, one can infer a psychological shift from protection to liberation. His work appears to move through phases of the "Walled Sanctuary," where he shielded his private identity, to the "Civic Backdrop" of national authority, ultimately culminating in a total surrender of authorship where architecture becomes a threshold for merging the self with the infinite.

The Architectural Autobiography: A Speculative Reading of Geoffrey Bawa



By: Kaushal Mukeshbhai Sardhara | UAR23100

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01

The Fragmented Search: Pre-Architectural Drifting

Bawa's architectural career did not begin with a blueprint but with a profound sense of displacement. As biographer David Robson notes, Bawa's early years were spent oscillating between the cosmopolitan salons of Europe and the colonial landscapes of Ceylon—a period where he existed as a "cultivated observer" rather than a maker (Robson, 2002).

This internal fragmentation is perhaps most visible in early projects like the Peter Keuneman House (1957–1959). Here, the architecture seems to mirror Bawa's own life at the time: spaces appear independent and loosely arranged, lacking a deliberate center. Unlike his later masterpieces, where rooms flow into a singular narrative, these early designs feel like isolated episodes. One might infer that the lack of "anchorage" in these plans—featuring volumes that seem to float within the site—reflects a designer who was himself hovering between disparate cultures and identities.

1. The Vertical Observer vs. The Grounded Participant:

House No.11, Bawa's residence, Colombo,

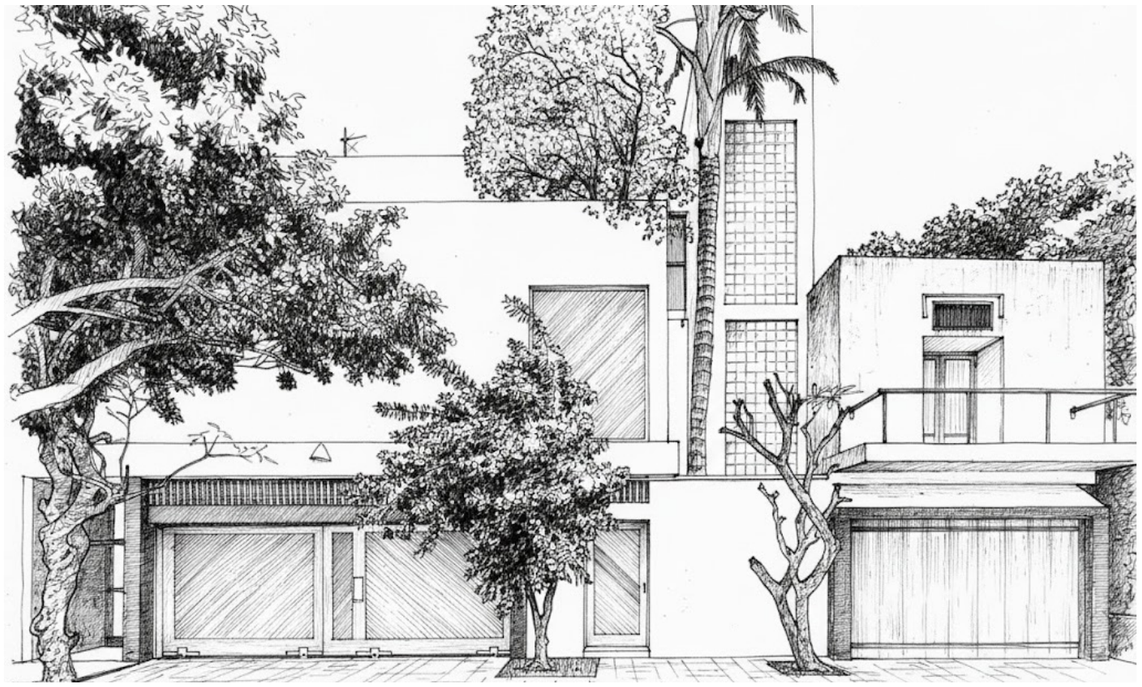


Fig. 1 The Tower at 33rd lane, (Early 1960s).

A stark, white, four-story slender tower rises into the air, topped with a viewing deck.

This represents the "White Period." It is a modernist "box" lifted into the sky to escape the ground. It looks out at the horizon.

Ena de Silva House, Colombo, 1962

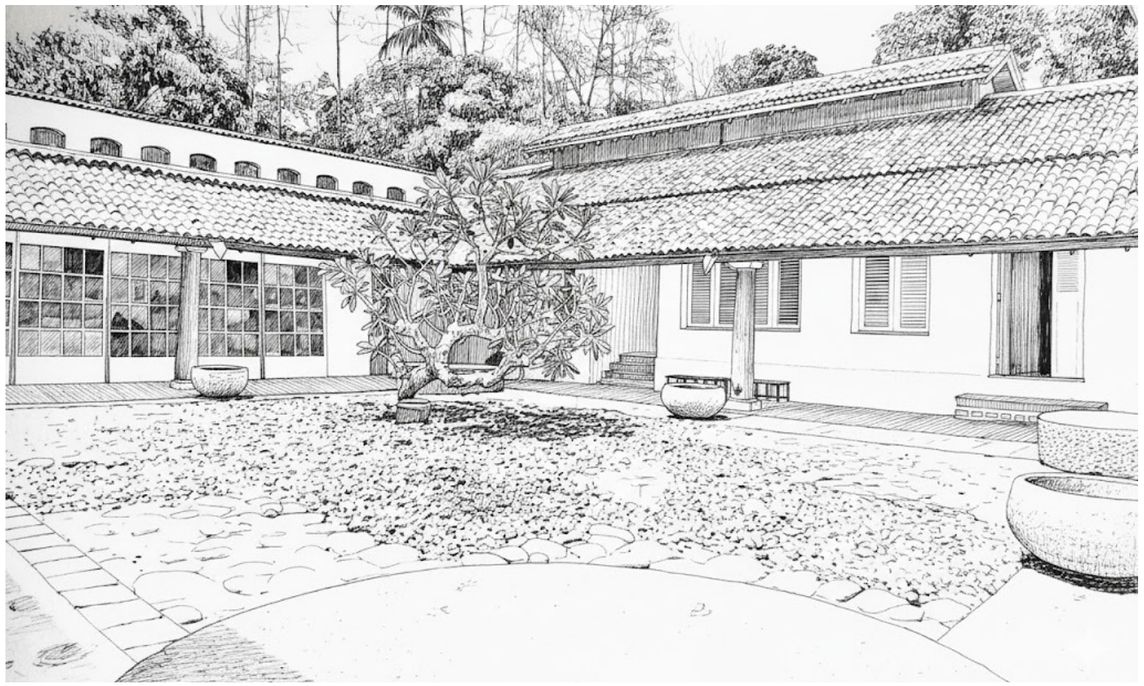


Fig. 2 The Courtyard at Ena de Silva House, (1962).

Designed as a wide, sprawling, single-story home, the architecture revolves around a traditional meda midula, or large open-to-sky central courtyard.

The "Descent." Bawa moves from the tower back to the earth. Instead of looking out over the city, he looks in toward a tree and the sky.

2. The Floating Volume vs. The Anchored Wall

Bishop's College Classroom Block, Colombo (1960)

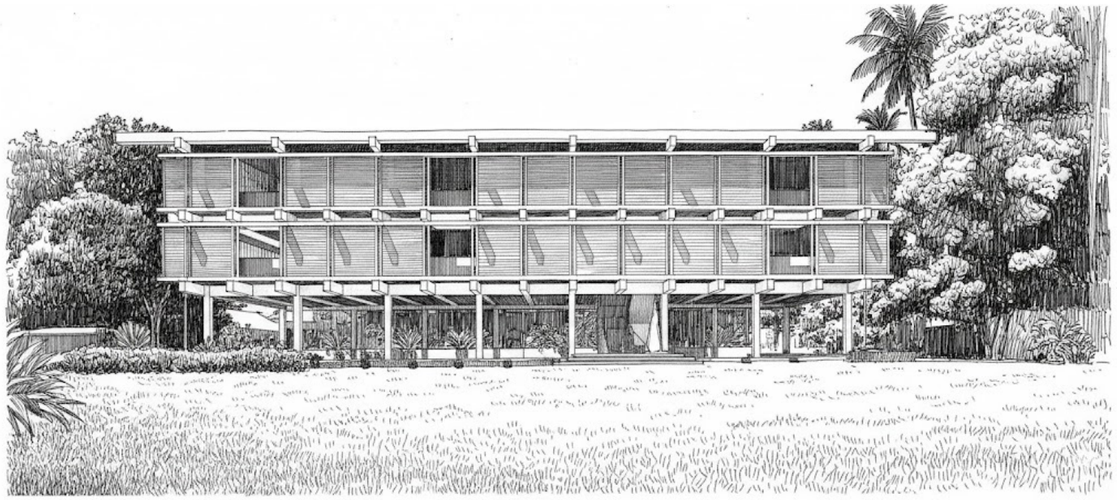


Fig. 3 A repetitive concrete frame (the "skeleton") raised on pilotis. The building is a series of stacked, identical trays. The ground level is a shaded, paved void—it is a space under the building rather than of the building.

The architecture is a rational, geometric grid imposed upon the site. It treats the ground as a flat plane to be stood upon, mirroring the Western modernist idea that a building should be a "machine" sitting in nature, protected by its own structure.

"The Modernist Stance." The building maintains a clean, hygienic distance from the humid earth.

Polonnaruwa Estate Bungalow, Nikarawetiya (1967)

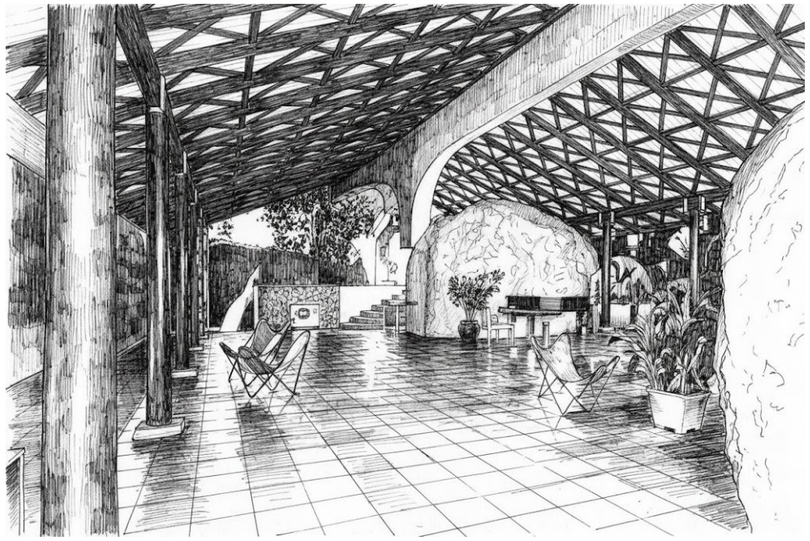


Fig.4 The Courtyard at Ena de Silva House, (1962).

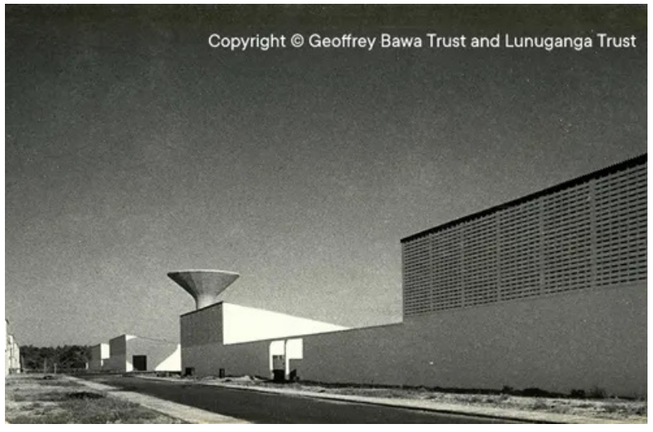
The house is built around massive boulders. The rocks are used as walls and the roof follows the slope of the land.

"Anchored." Bawa no longer drifts; he embeds the architecture into the literal geological reality of the site.

3. Modernist "Frames" vs. Traditional "Voids"

Bishop's College Classroom Block, Colombo (1960)

Fig. 5 At Ekala, Bawa was trying to bring "order" to the landscape through a repetitive grid. At Kandalama, he intentionally allowed the "disorder" of the jungle to reclaim the architecture

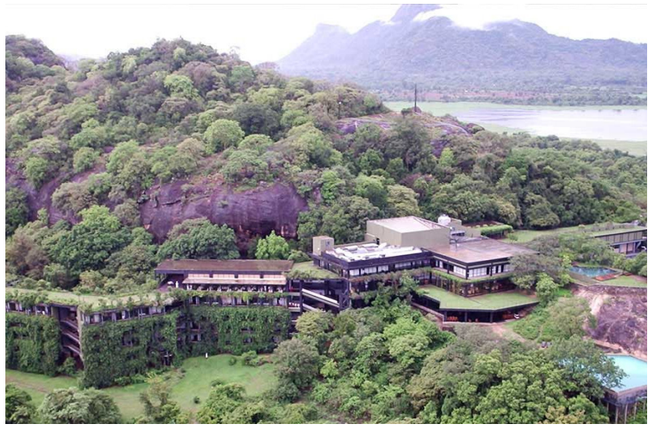


Stark, repetitive white concrete frames, flat roofs, and a strictly horizontal silhouette. It is an "uncompromising" grid.

The Rigid Frame. This is Bawa's most clinical, modernist period. It prioritizes the "Frame" (the structure) over the environment, treating the building as a self-contained object.

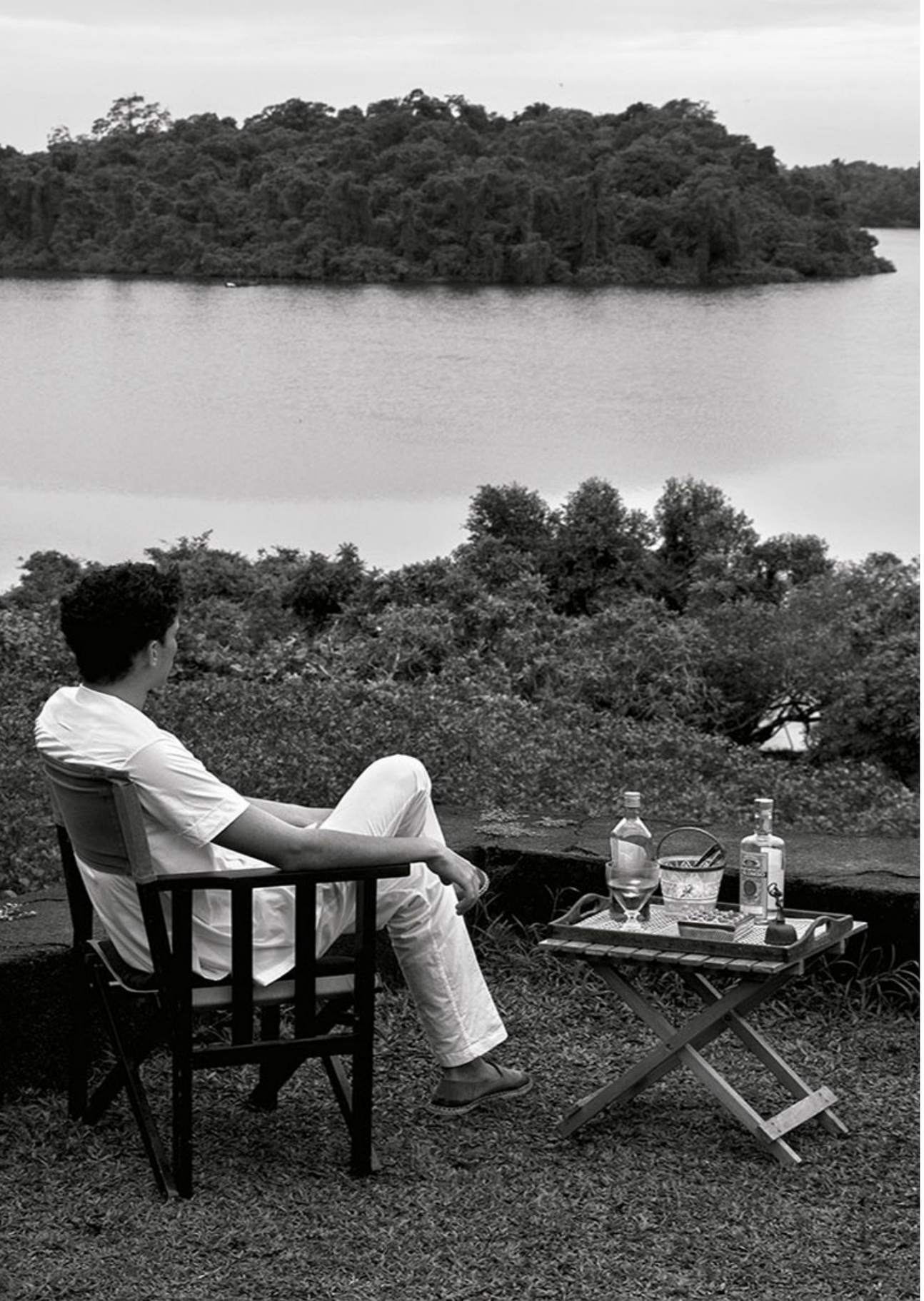
Polonnaruwa Estate Bungalow, Nikarawetiya (1967)

Fig. 6 The Courtyard at Ena de Silva House, (1962).



A building completely draped in jungle vines, appearing to be a natural extension of the rock cliff.

The Disappearing Act. The ultimate end of the "Drift." The building has surrendered its sharp edges to nature; the structure is now the "Void" that the forest fills.



02

The Walled Santuary: Constructing the Protected Self

By the late 1940s, the "drifting observer" found a center at Lunuganga. While historical records focus on his aesthetic inspirations, one can speculate on the social atmosphere for a gay man in post-colonial Ceylon—a world of rigid surveillance. In response, Bawa's architectural gaze turned inward.

At Lunuganga, enclosure does not diminish openness but gives it weight. It feels like an architecture of the sanctuary. He created a labyrinth of "pockets"—hidden courtyards that could function as a screen against a public "gaze." The sensual quality of the garden—populated with classical male nudes and subtle stone motifs—creates a stage for a private aesthetic that was deliberately shielded. While Bawa rarely spoke of his identity in relation to his work, the tactile intimacy of these garden rooms suggests a space where a "private kingdom" could finally exist.

Decoding Geoffrey Bawa's Private Kingdom:

Fig. 7 The entrance gate with iconic bell of Lunuganga country estate.

Bawa's "Choke Point" is a sensory filter designed to break the visitor's connection to the external world. By forcing a transition through a dark, claustrophobic tunnel of foliage, he triggers a physical deceleration. You are forced to abandon the rigid, upright posture of colonial formality to navigate the overgrowth.

This "purification" relies on compression and release: the discomfort of the narrow path makes the eventual revelation of the wide vistas feel like a spiritual expansion. It is a psychological "palate cleanser" that sheds social pretensions, ensuring you enter the garden not as a spectator, but as a humbled participant.

Visualizing the Shift: Shift from Protection to Liberation

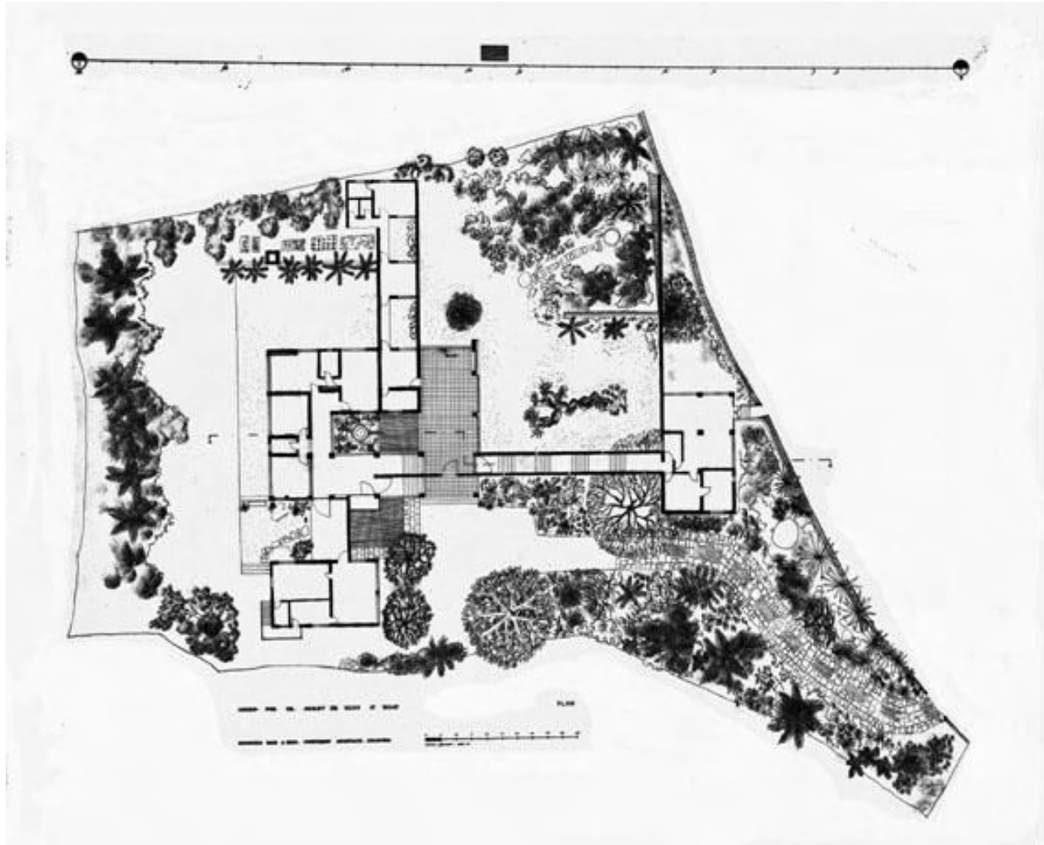


Fig. 11 The Wall as a Barrier (Protection).
Project: The A.S.H. de Silva House (1960) – Galle

The Ena de Silva House serves as Bawa's definitive architectural manifesto on the walled sanctuary. By utilizing an "introverted" layout, he created a radical buffer against the external scrutiny of 1950s Colombo. This fortified privacy was not merely structural but deeply social; it carved out a space where a "private kingdom" of queer-coded art and collaborative craft could flourish without consequence.

Through high walls and labyrinthine corridors, the house hides its vibrant, creative core from the street. It represents a physical manifestation of Bawa's need for an impenetrable interior, where identity could be expressed freely, shielded by stone.

Fig. 8 In the pocket, the gaze is directed upward to the heavens or inward to the self, never outward to the neighbor.

The "Secret Courtyard" (The Pocket) realizes the "labyrinth of pockets" theory by employing the Hortus Conclusus to prioritize verticality over visibility. In the Gallery Room or North Terrace, the architecture severs the horizontal gaze, leaving the sky as the only witness. This transformation turns the home into a sensory vessel where atmospheric light replaces the social noise of the neighborhood.

Systematically, the "Vantage Point Diagram" reveals a recursive geometry. By placing high masonry walls as visual baffles, sightlines are diverted. Rather than looking "out" toward neighbors, the inhabitant's view is reflected inward or upward, creating a "Visual Dead Zone" that ensures total privacy.

The meta-text is a rejection of the public gaze. It posits that by directing the gaze inward, the architecture liberates the self from the performance of being seen.

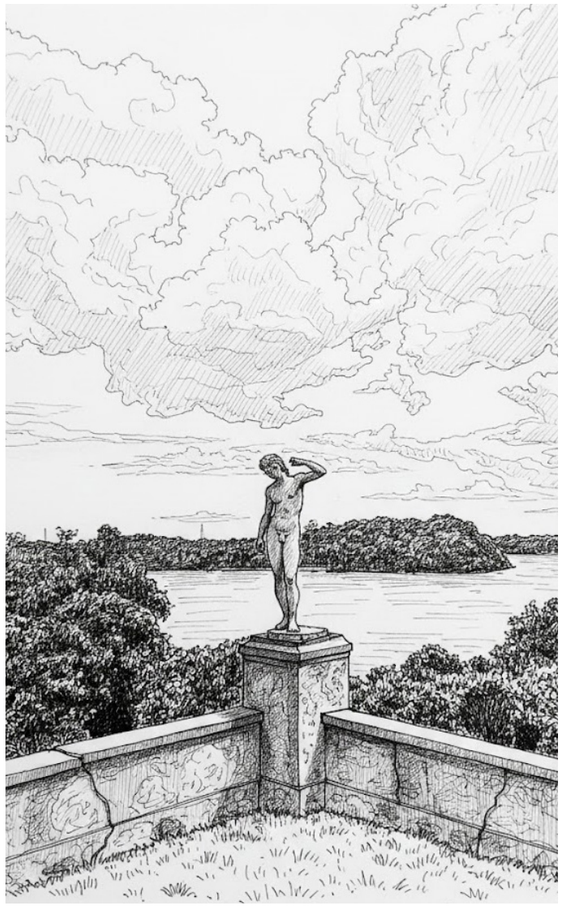


Fig. 9 The classical statues are the "citizens" of his private kingdom.

The "Coded Altar" represents Bawa's most subversive act of landscape curation. By placing Italian-style Poggi statues—specifically the male nude—within the tropical wildness of Lunuganga, he established a "private kingdom" where the human form was liberated from the suffocating Victorian morality of 1950s Ceylon.

The Power of Juxtaposition
The tension lies in the contrast between the garden and the "civilized" world outside. While contemporary newspapers decried the breakdown of social decency, Bawa's statues stood as silent, defiant citizens of an alternative reality. To the casual visitor, they were mere classical ornaments; to the initiated, they were an unapologetic celebration of queer identity and bodily autonomy.

The Gaze of Understanding
As the meta-text suggests, the statue's "waiting" is a test of the observer. In a society governed by rigid post-colonial decorum, the nude form was a scandal to be hidden. At Lunuganga, however, the statue is central. It does not shrink from the gaze; it demands a viewer who has moved past the "choke point" of societal judgment. It is an altar to a different kind of truth—one where beauty is not a sin, but a sanctuary.

Fig. 10 The Sunset bell at estate.

The "Closing Gaze" at the Sunset Bell marks the final stage of the Lunuganga ritual, where the visitor's journey evolves from passive observation to a total immersion in Bawa's curated reality. Positioned at the edge of the lake, the bell is a profound symbol of sovereignty and temporal control. Outside the gates, time is dictated by the industrial clock and the social obligations of post-colonial life; inside, Bawa reclaimed time as a personal medium. By ringing the bell to summon service or signal the transition to evening, he effectively paused the outside world, asserting that within this sanctuary, the only rhythm that matters is the setting of the sun and the desire of the inhabitant.

This act transforms the occupant from a "drifting observer"—one who merely wanders through beauty—into the "settled king" of a private domain. The bell stands as a sentinel at the water's edge, its silhouette against the darkening sky marking the boundary where the land ends and the infinite begins. It is the ultimate tool of agency; it represents the power to call upon the world to wait, ensuring that the "Closing Gaze" is not just a view of a landscape, but an active command over one's environment and peace.

03

The Relational Platform: Emerging into Dialogue

As Bawa's practice matured, his architecture shifted from private refuge to a platform for social encounter. In his Colombo home, No. 11, space becomes "relational."

He mastered the language of compression and release, using shaded corridors to build tension before releasing the inhabitant into sun-drenched courtyards. This transition suggests a movement beyond shyness. The architecture becomes a shared platform, using open space to bridge the gap between the individual and a growing circle of artists and thinkers. This spatial strategy implies a newfound comfort in mediation—where the wall is no longer a barrier, but a filter.

Fig. 12 The Wall as a Filter (Dialogue).
Project: House No.11, Columbo.

In House No. 11, Bawa's own residence, the boundary between the room and the courtyard is intentionally blurred, moving away from the "walled fortress" of his earlier work. This "blending" is achieved through a strategy of material and structural continuity. The white-walled interiors often extend directly into the courtyard without a change in floor level or texture, making the sky feel like the room's ceiling.

Rather than using solid walls, Bawa employs transparent thresholds—large glass doors, open colonnades, or simple changes in light. This creates a "relational" space where a person sitting in the shaded living room is visually and climatically connected to the rain or sunlight in the courtyard. This design supports your narrative of mediation: the architecture no longer acts as a hard barrier to hide the self, but as a porous filter that allows the inhabitant to engage with the environment and guests in a choreographed, "wall-less" flow.

Visualizing the Movement : Sequence of Experience in House no. 11

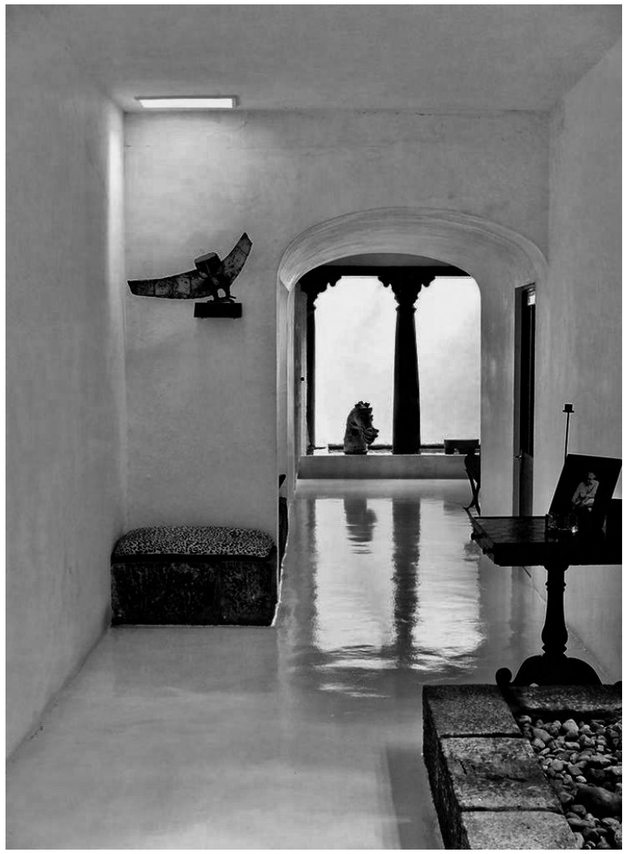


Fig. 13: Compression (The Corridor)

"A dark, narrow threshold that functions as a psychological 'closet.' Here, the architecture enforces a sense of solitude and enclosure, mirroring the introverted state of the 'protected self.'"

Fig. 14: Release (The Main Courtyard)

"The transition into a sun-drenched, relational platform. The 'wall-less' living area suggests a newfound comfort in social mediation, where the self is no longer shielded but is invited into dialogue with the landscape and the collective."

Fig. 15: The Threshold (The Edge)

"The literal and metaphorical breaking of the wall. This interstitial space—where the enclosure begins to yield to the sky—represents the tension between the private interior and the external world."

04

The Civic Backdrop: The Stability of Authority

By the 1980s, Bawa's personal journey aligned with the identity of the nation. In the Sri Lankan Parliament, his treatment of space achieved a grand scale. The "protected self" had matured into a state of quiet authority.

Here, open space is no longer about individual expression but about institutional balance. He used water courts and expansive terraces to create a sense of permanence. In this phase, the architect seemingly recedes, allowing the building to act as a composed backdrop for collective life. His identity appears to have stabilized, finding belonging within the larger structure of the nation.

Domestic Solitude to Civic Authority: Bawa's Public Turn

Fig. 16: The Parliament complex reflected in the surrounding Diyawanna Oya lake.

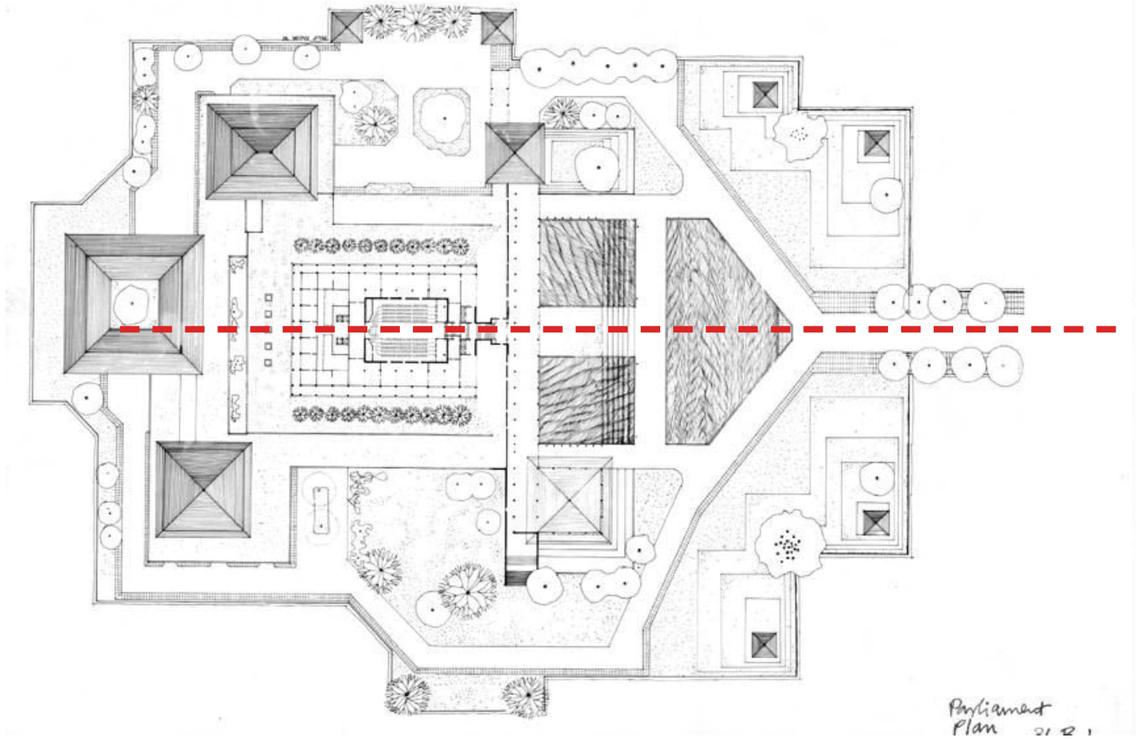
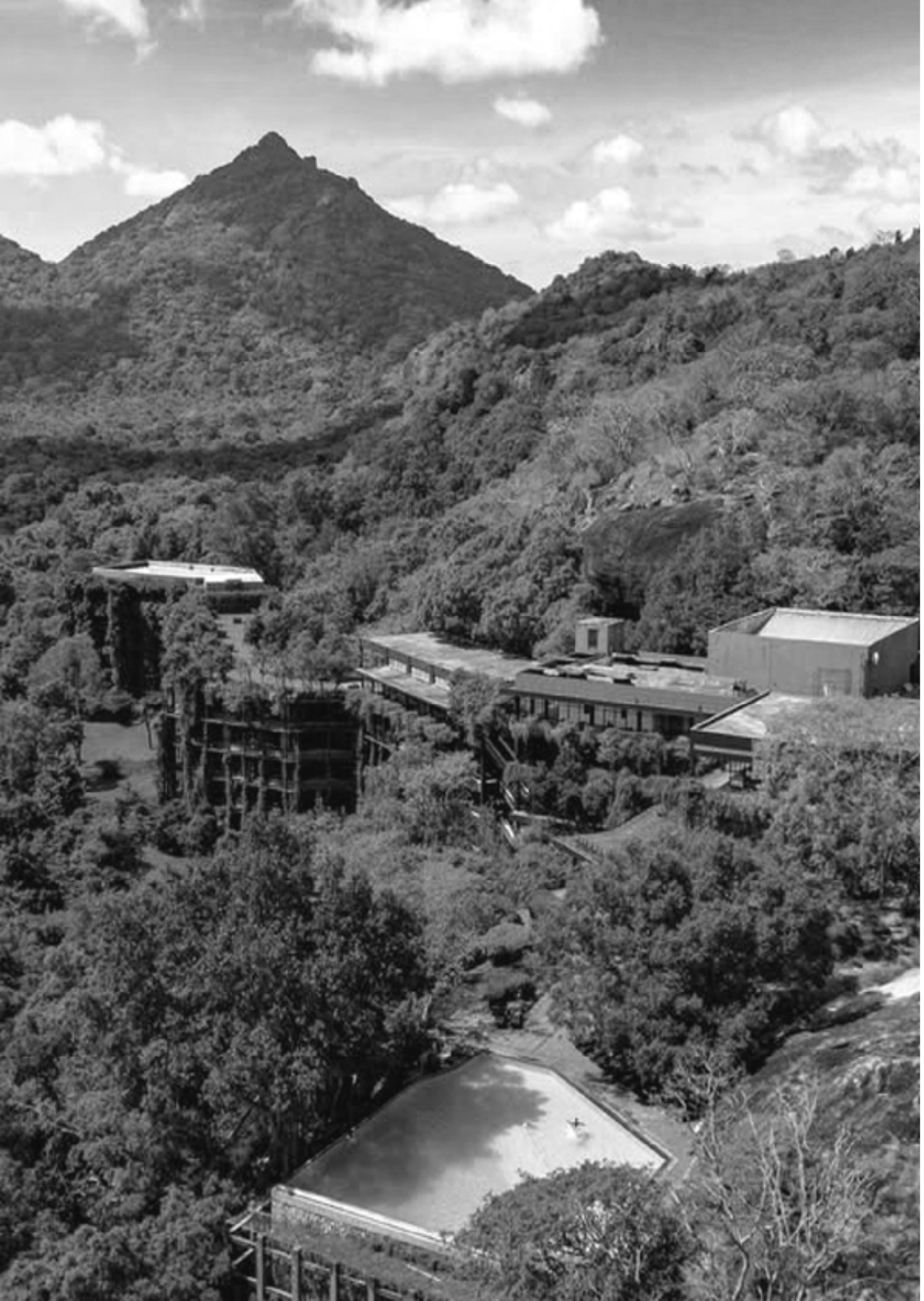


Fig. 17: A departure from the 'private kingdom': The symmetry of the Parliament reflects a psychological shift toward permanence and belonging. The 'protected self' of Bawa's youth matures into a state of quiet, civic authority.

In the Sri Lankan Parliament, Bawa reimagines the element of water, transforming it from a tool of clandestine isolation into a symbol of state legitimacy. At Lunuganga, water was often used to create intimate, hidden "pockets" that shielded the private self; however, at the Parliament, the vast Diyawanna Oya functions as a ceremonial moat that bestows a sense of "Stability and Permanence."

This is a profound shift from the private garden to the public monument. Here, the water no longer serves as a "secret pool" tucked away in a labyrinthine jungle; it is a clear, expansive civic boundary that elevates the structure. By detaching the building from the mainland, Bawa creates a monumental island—an architecture that is both protected and exposed. One might speculate that this reflects a personal stabilization: the architect is no longer hiding his identity behind a garden wall, but is instead projecting a composed, dignified presence upon a national stage.

"In contrast to the fragmented, floating volumes of his early work, the floor plan of the Parliament is defined by a rigid, centered symmetry. This spatial order suggests a shift from the 'drifting observer' to an architect of authority, where centeredness represents a stabilized identity—both for the individual and the nascent nation."



05

The Wall-less Jungle: The Ultimate Act of Liberation

The final chapter of this spatial autobiography is written at Heritance Kandalama. This building serves as a manifestation of transcendence. To enter Kandalama is to experience a sequence that feels like a psychological journey: a dark, rock-lined tunnel that eventually "explodes" into a panoramic, wall-less vista.

This theatrical reveal can be read as a moment of liberation. Kandalama is a "non-binary" building—neither purely architecture nor purely nature. In this final stage, Bawa's surrender of authorship was complete. He moved from protecting his identity behind walls to allowing it to merge entirely with the landscape. His legacy proves that spaces can be designed not just to shelter us, but to liberate us, charting a path from the secluded "private kingdom" to a final, restful disappearance into the earth.

Transcendence:

Fig. 18: A photograph of the Kandalama facade where the concrete is almost entirely covered by vines.

"Architecture as a Threshold: Here, the 'wall' is no longer a barrier but a trellis for nature. This surrender of authorship suggests a final stage of psychological liberation, where the architect allows his work to be 'swallowed' by the landscape."

The "Tunnel vs. Horizon"

Fig. 19 The "Exit from the Closet" is not merely a visual reveal; it is a haptic transition. The entrance tunnel at Kandalama is characterized by raw, unyielding rock and a heavy shadows—a space that feels subterranean and clandestine. This represents the "architecture of secrecy," where the individual is compressed by the weight of social and self-imposed walls.

As the visitor moves through this dark passage, the sudden "explosion" into the panoramic vista of the Kandalama tank and the Sigiriya rock beyond serves as a spatial catharsis. The removal of the wall is the removal of the mask. In this "wall-less" state, the distinction between the internal self and the external world is obliterated. By surrendering the boundary, Bawa suggests that true belonging is not found by building a more secure "closet," but by dissolving the closet entirely.

"If Lunuganga was the search, and the Parliament was the arrival, Kandalama is the departure. Bawa's career ends not with a grand monument to himself, but with an architecture that gracefully steps aside to let the world in."

Bibliograpghy:

1. Primary Biographical & Architectural Sources
Robson, David. Geoffrey Bawa: The Complete Works. London: Thames & Hudson, 2002.

Used for: Details on Bawa's early "drifting" years in Europe, his return to Ceylon, and the chronological development of the Keuneman and de Silva houses.

2. Daswatte, Channa. "The Architecture of Geoffrey Bawa." Architectural Review, 1998.

Used for: Understanding the technical application of "compression and release" and the movement between internal and external spaces.

3. Taylor, Brian Brace. Geoffrey Bawa. London: Thames & Hudson, 1986.

Used for: Analysis of early projects and the development of the "Tropical Modernist" vocabulary.

4. Contextual & Post-Colonial Theory
Jazeel, Tariq. Sacred Modernity: Nature, Environment and the Postcolonial Geographies of Sri Lankan Nationhood. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013.

Used for: The "National Identity" context regarding the Sri Lankan Parliament and the politics of the "wall-less" landscape.

5. Jayawardene-Pillai, Shanti. Geoffrey Bawa: Post-Colonial Architect. Colombo: Karunaratne & Sons, 2010.

Used for: Observations on how Bawa's architecture negotiated the shift from colonial heritage to a new national authority.

6. Interpretative & Critical Framework (Your Narrative Foundation)
Robson, David. Bawa: The Sri Lanka Gardens. London: Thames & Hudson, 2008.

Used for: Details on Lunuganga's "pockets" and the inclusion of art and sculpture that hint at a private, cultivated aesthetic.

7. Daswatte, Channa and Sansoni, Dominic. Bawa: At Home in Ceylon. London: Thames & Hudson, 1998.

Used for: Visual and spatial references for House No. 11 and its role as a social hub.

1. Essential Biographical & Comprehensive Works
These are the "authoritative" sources your faculty is looking for.

Robson, David. Geoffrey Bawa: The Complete Works. Thames & Hudson, 2002.

Significance: The "Bawa Bible." It provides the most detailed account of his "drifting" years in London and Italy and the timeline of his projects.

Taylor, Brian Brace. Geoffrey Bawa. Mimar/ Thames & Hudson, 1986.

Significance: One of the earliest monographs that categorizes his work before he became a global icon; excellent for analyzing his "middle period" projects.

Daswatte, Channa and Dominic Sansoni. Bawa: At Home in Ceylon. Thames & Hudson, 1998.

Significance: Focuses on the intimate, lived-in qualities of Bawa's own spaces (House No. 11 and Lunuganga), which supports your "Walled Sanctuary" narrative.

2. Landscape & The Private Self
These books focus on his gardens, where your "queer aesthetic" and "sanctuary" theories are most applicable.

Robson, David. Bawa: The Sri Lanka Gardens. Thames & Hudson, 2008.

Significance: Deeply explores Lunuganga as a lifelong project. It details the sculptures and "in-jokes" you mentioned in your essay.

Bawa, Geoffrey, Christoph Bon, and Dominic Sansoni. Lunuganga. Marshall Cavendish, 1990.

Significance: A photographic and poetic journey through his private estate; essential for understanding the "pockets" of privacy he created.

3. National Identity & Post-Colonial Context
These books support your "Civic Backdrop" chapter.

Jazeel, Tariq. Sacred Modernity: Nature, Environment and the Postcolonial Geographies of Sri Lankan Nationhood. Liverpool University Press, 2013.

Significance: Critically analyzes how Bawa's architecture helped "construct" the identity of the Sri Lankan nation. This is your best source for the Parliament section.

Jayawardene-Pillai, Shanti. Geoffrey Bawa: Post-Colonial Architect. Karunaratne & Sons, 2010.

Significance: Provides a more critical, political reading of Bawa's work within the context of Sri Lankan history.

4. Supporting Cultural Context
To understand the "social norms" and "surveillance" of the time.

Pieris, Anoma. Architecture and Nationalism in Sri Lanka: The Settler-Colonial Legacy. Routledge, 2012.

Significance: Explores the intersections of architecture, identity, and the state in Sri Lanka.

Robson, David. Beyond Bawa: Modern Masterpieces of Monsoon Asia. Thames & Hudson, 2007.

Significance: Places Bawa in a larger regional context, helping you argue his shift toward "transcendence" in the final chapters.

House No.11: An Experiential Reading

Space, Restraint, and Attitude

Soham Kharche UAR21131

This presentation examines Geoffrey Bawa's House No.11 through direct experience, observation, and spatial analysis. The study is grounded in what is encountered while moving through the house, how space is revealed, controlled, and sequenced, and how these spatial conditions suggest underlying attitudes toward living, privacy, and engagement. The intent is to develop an analytical perspective that reads the house as a lived environment shaped over time, rather than a singular architectural gesture.

Through drawings, diagrams, and experiential sketches, the presentation traces recurring spatial strategies such as inward orientation, absence of centrality, calibrated movement, and the integration of courtyards. These observations are critically interpreted in relation to known personal traits of Geoffrey Bawa, not as factual biography, but as tendencies that appear spatially consistent within the house. The focus remains on what the architecture demonstrates rather than what it declares.

By foregrounding experience and

07b

Project Profile

Project: House No. 11

Building Type: Residential

Building Usage: Private Residence

Architect: Geoffrey Bawa

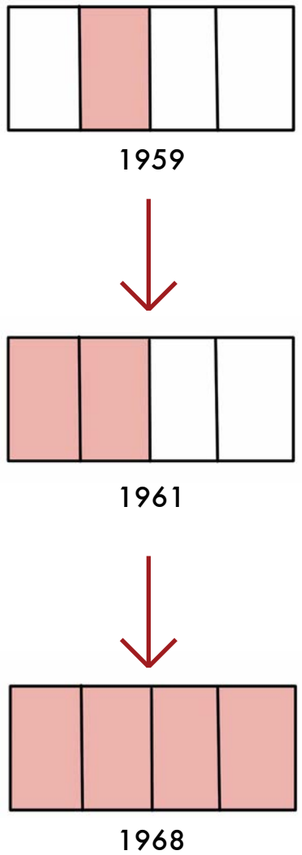
Original Structure Built: 1910s (as row houses)

Built Area: 400 sq.m.

Renovation/Transformation Period: 1959-98

Location: House No. 11, 33rd Lane, Bagatelle Road, Colombo, Sri Lanka

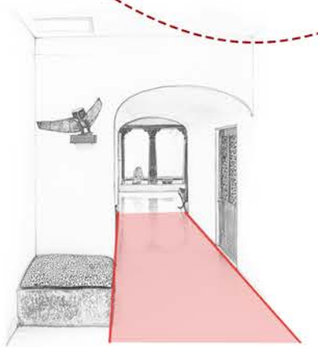
Acquisition of Row Houses



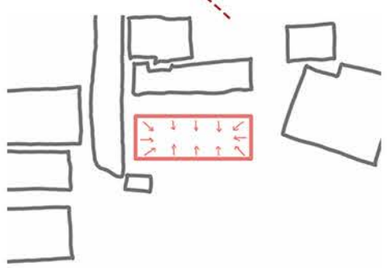
In 1959, Bawa acquired the third of four adjoining bungalows along 33rd Lane. Initially, he lived in a small, self-designed flat on the narrow site, comprising basic living spaces, a courtyard garden, a master bedroom, and a room for his attendant, Miguel. In 1961, he purchased the neighbouring plot and expanded the house to include additional indoor and outdoor areas. Seven years later, Bawa acquired the remaining two bungalows, enabling a comprehensive redevelopment of the entire four-plot site.

1950 EARLY PHASE
Late Career Start

Modernist and Cautious
Became an architect late(38 years)
Caution, discipline and experimentation
Strong Modernist Influence (British Modernism, AA School)
Simple forms clean lines, still object buildings, still not fully landscape driven
Structure more visible than space sequence
Key works include Bishop's College and some private houses in Colombo along with early work at Lunuganga.



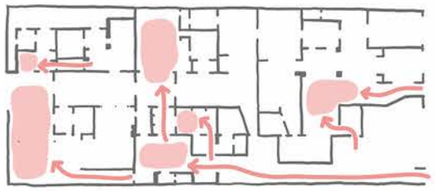
Curated Revelation
Tight thresholds lead to expansive, light-filled spaces, mirroring Bawa's private personality and his preference for selective exposure shaped by increasing architectural assurance.



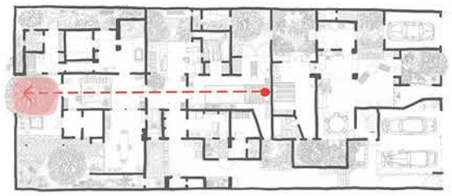
Inward Orientation and Urban Withdrawal
The house does not engage the city visually; instead, it absorbs and filters it, ultimately turning away, depicting Bawa's private life, discreet identity, and preference for separation from the urban sprawl through its inward-looking nature.

1960 MIDDLE PHASE
Identity Formation

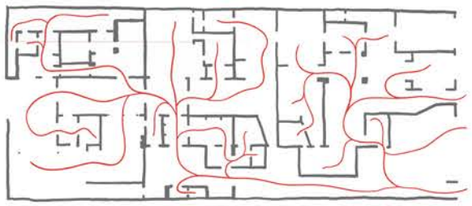
Tropical Modernism
No longer trying to fit in with Western Modernism, identity as Sri Lankan Architect solidifies
Buildings start to merge with landscape
Courtyards, roofs, water, verandahs and deep overhangs become design tools
Open plans responding to climate
Strong indoor-outdoor continuity
Buildings experienced in sequence and not as objects
Walls become filters, not barriers
Key works include Lunuganga, St. Bridget's Convent, Bentota Beach Hotel and Serendib Hotel



Compression to Release
Narrow, dim passages open into larger, brighter spaces, reflecting Bawa's controlled nature and growing professional confidence, where architecture is revealed gradually rather than immediately.



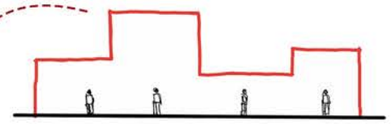
Seeing Without Exposure
The simple, precise axis reveals Bawa's assured control of space, achieved through restraint rather than overt form.



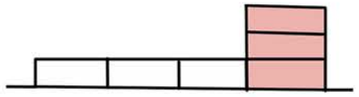
Architecture as Journey
The rejection of a central space reflects Bawa's architectural confidence, relying on sequence and movement rather than formal hierarchy.

1970 MATURE PHASE
Emotional Confidence

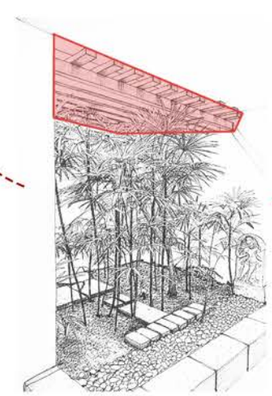
Spatial Mastery
Bawa at his philosophical peak
Deeply private- buildings become introverted
Architecture becomes almost invisible and dissolves into terrain
Heavy use of axial views, framed landscapes, long approach sequences
Scale increases dramatically
Still intimate despite monumentality
Key works include Parliament, Major renovation of House no. 11
Blue Water and Kandalama Hotel

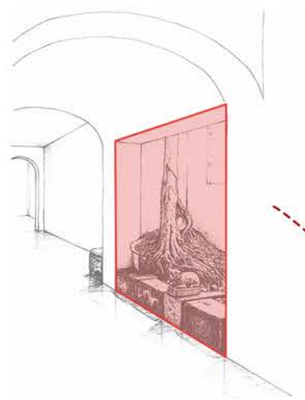


Shifting Volumes and Heights
Varying room heights and volumes reflect Bawa's controlled, introspective nature and his confident manipulation of space during a mature phase of practice.



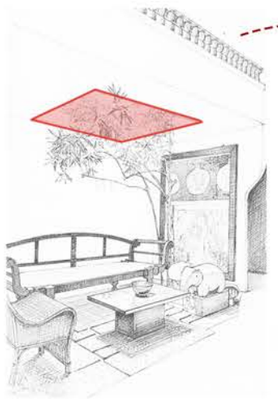
Building Upward, Living Inward
The vertical rebuilding of the first house allowed social engagement without compromising Bawa's privacy, revealing confidence in both life and practice

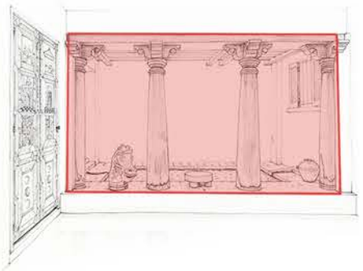




1980onwards LATE PHASE
Aging & Reflection

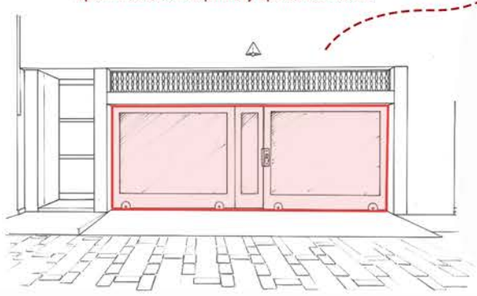
Minimal and Silent
Aging, illness and physical limitation
Slower & quieter and even fewer gestures
Minimalism, restraint and silence
Less experimentation, more refinement
Emotional maturity in space
Architecture almost disappears
Buildings feel carved, eroded and grown
Landscape dominates completely
Key Works include Kandalama Hotel completion, Jetwing Lighthouse Hotel and Lunuganga becomes almost meditative





Nature as a Private Companion
Bawa incorporates vegetation and skylights within courtyards, expressing his desire for solitude, privacy, and quiet connection with nature.

Confidence in the Void
The generous use of courtyards reflects Bawa's architectural maturity, where emptiness and openness become primary spatial elements.



Blank Street Façade
The entrance marks a deliberate boundary between public chaos and Bawa's private inner world.

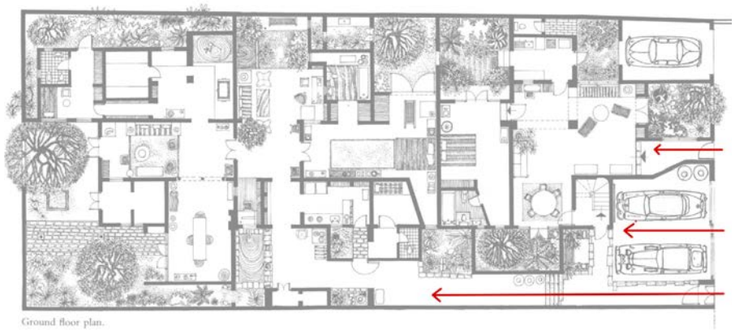
Reading Through Experience

House No.11 remained significant due to what it withheld rather than what it displayed. Unlike buildings that rely on immediate form or gesture for legibility, the house revealed itself gradually, requiring time and attentiveness to be understood. This mode of experience prompted a critical reflection on contemporary architectural tendencies toward instant visibility, highlighting the rarity of spaces that demand patience and sustained engagement. The following study traces a series of spatial moments through understanding of architectural experience evolved while moving through the house.

First Encounter: The Street

The street façade marks the first biographical gesture. In a dense and animated Colombo street, the house presents a silent front, withholding views and expression. This deliberate disengagement suggests an early and consistent desire for separation between public life and private self. The city is acknowledged, but never invited in.

"The house does not engage the city visually; instead, it turns away."



Ground floor plan.

Controlled Entry

The act of entering the house is slow and deliberate. The narrowing of space, the lack of visual clarity, and the absence of immediate openness suggest a life lived with boundaries. Entry is not denied, but mediated. This controlled threshold reflects a personal approach to social interaction, welcoming, yet carefully measured.

"Entry is not immediate; it is negotiated."

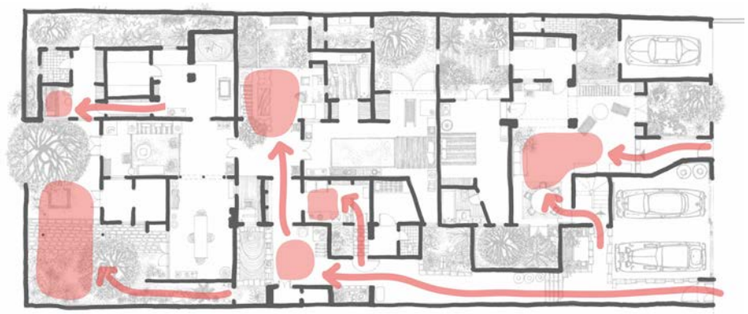
Sequence over Centre

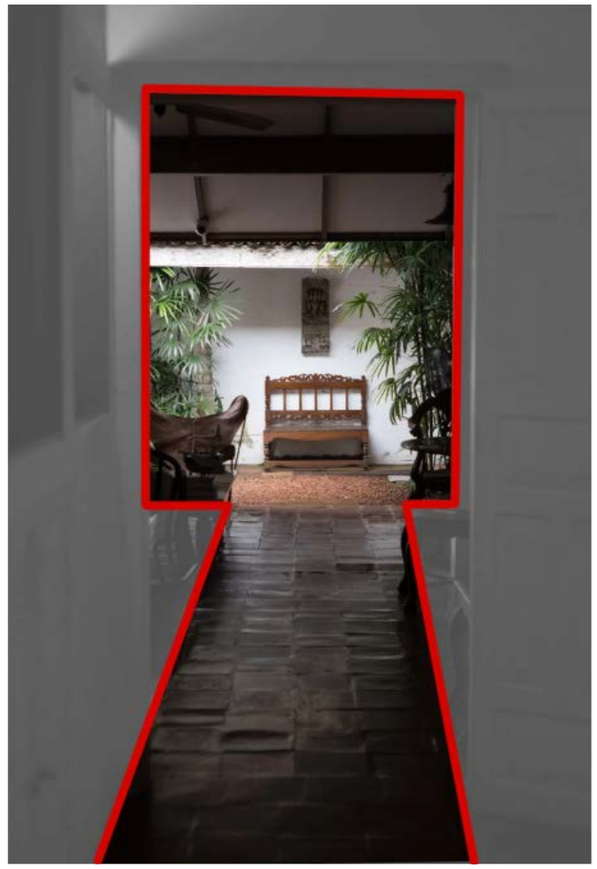
Inside, the absence of a central space becomes telling. Life here does not gather around a single room or social core. Instead, it unfolds through movement and sequence. This spatial condition reflects a preference for independence, fluidity, and inward reflection rather than collective display or formality.

"The house is organised as a journey, not around a centre."

Learning Through Restraint

As one moves deeper, the alternating compression and release of space reveals a growing architectural confidence. Rather than relying on grand gestures, the house depends on subtle shifts in scale and light. This restraint suggests a mature understanding of space, where control replaces excess, and experience outweighs form.

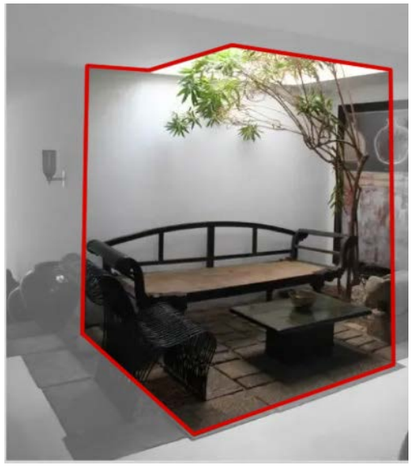




"Spatial compression heightens awareness before release."

Nature as Companion

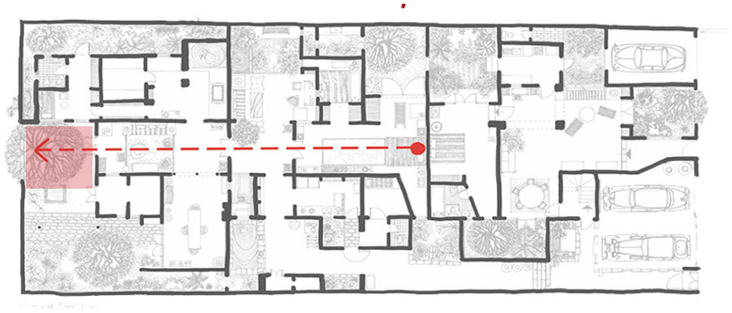
Courtyards introduce light, air, and vegetation into the interior. Nature is not presented as landscape or view, but as a quiet presence woven into daily life. These internal gardens suggest solitude, routine, and a close relationship with the natural world—experienced privately and repeatedly over time.



"Nature is framed, not accessed, experienced privately rather than openly."

Intimacy and Orientation

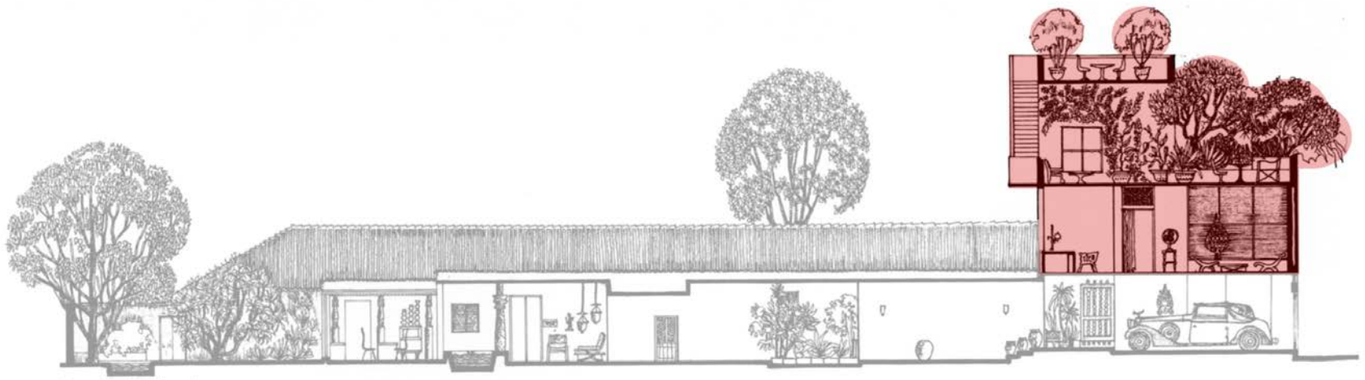
More private spaces within the house are carefully aligned, with windows and openings positioned to admit light without exposure. These decisions speak of intimacy that is protected rather than displayed. The house reveals a life attentive to daily rhythms, where privacy is maintained even at moments of rest.



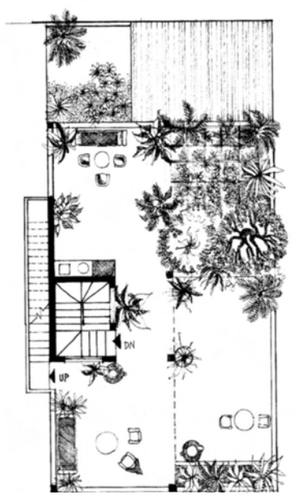
"Even intimacy is carefully oriented and controlled."

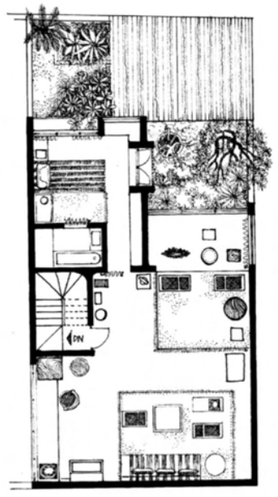
Change as Continuity

The demolition of the original house and its vertical expansion mark a significant moment in the house's biography. Rather than abandoning the existing structure, it is reworked and extended. Growth occurs inwardly and upward, suggesting confidence without exhibition, an ability to transform while preserving the essence of the place.



Longitudinal section.





Growth occurs inward and upward, not outward."

What Remains

Visiting House No.11 helped me understand Bawa's architecture not as a style, but as an attitude. The house does not perform; it withdraws. It does not explain; it reveals slowly. Through this visit, I realised that Bawa's most personal project was not symbolic, but behavioural, where architecture quietly mirrors the rhythms, boundaries, and restraint of a life lived inwardly.

07c

Dwelling in Solitude

Different Spatial Responses to Privacy in Two Residential works by Bawa
Ena de Silva | House 11

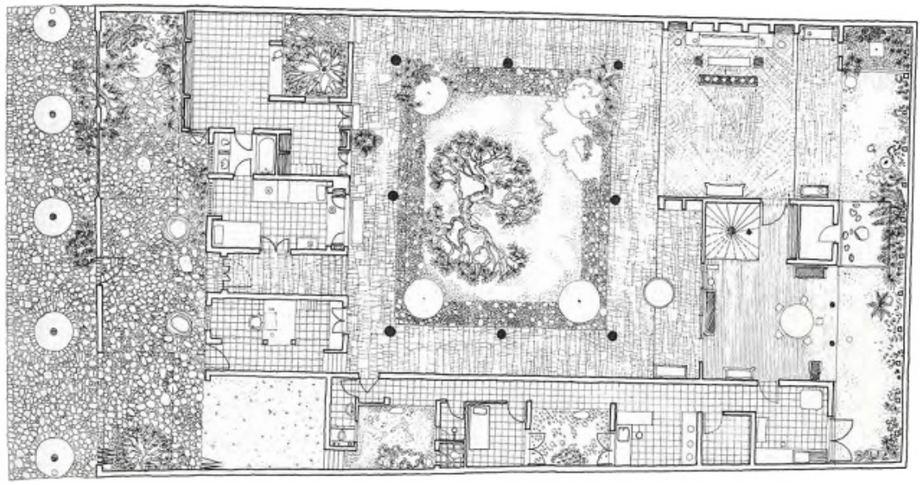
Prarthana Puri UAR23171

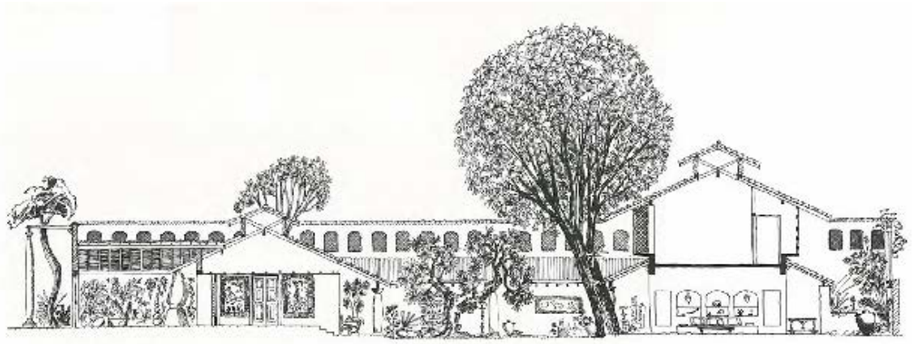
In Geoffrey Bawa's domestic architecture, engagement with the city is rarely direct. Streets are treated as edges rather than invitations, and the house turns inward, prioritising lived experience over outward expression. This inward orientation is not merely a defensive response to urban conditions, but a deliberate architectural attitude, one that filters the outside world and carefully composes moments of privacy and release.

Across his residential works, solitude is not understood as the absence of the outside, but as its controlled re-composition. External conditions like noise, density, proximity, are neither denied nor confronted directly. Instead, they are tackled through layers, thresholds, and internal landscapes. While this attitude remains consistent, its architectural expression varies significantly from project to project.

This variation is evident in the contrasting residential strategies of the Ena de Silva House and House 11. In the former, solitude is structured through control and enclosure, organised around a single dominant courtyard that anchors movement, privacy, and spatial release. In the latter, solitude emerges through freedom and accumulation, with multiple courts, blurred thresholds, and meandering movement producing a more open-ended experience. Together, these houses show how a shared desire for inwardness can produce contrasting architectures, where solitude is alternately composed through control and through freedom.

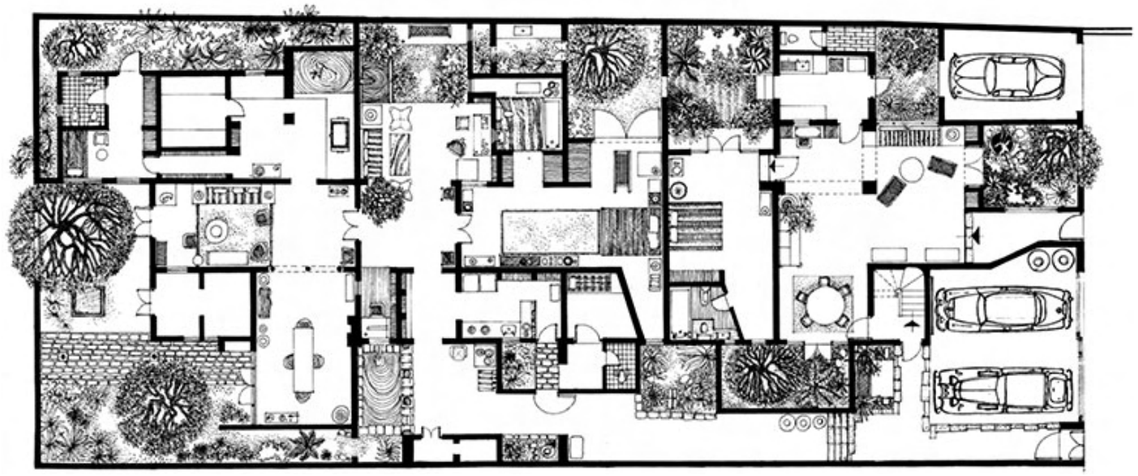
Ena de Silva House 1960–1962

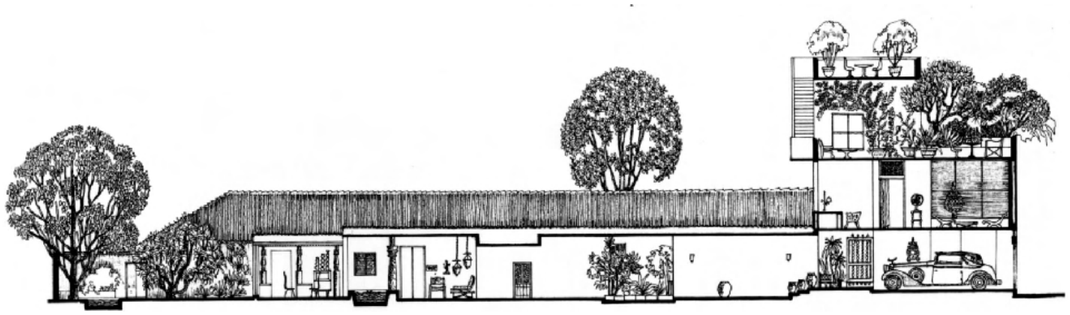




Source: Geoffrey Bawa Trust.

House 11 1958–1960





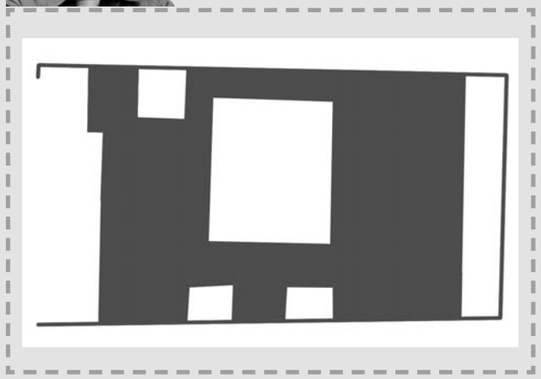
Source: Geoffrey Bawa Trust.

01 INTENT

ENA DE SILVA HOUSE 1960-1962

The site was small, urban, corner bound, and increasingly congested

Bawa's Solution



- Carved space out of a solid mass
- Continuity between inside and outside
- Mass precedes void

Solitude here is a controlled architectural condition, achieved by carving inward

Ena de Silva rejected the colonial bungalow typology

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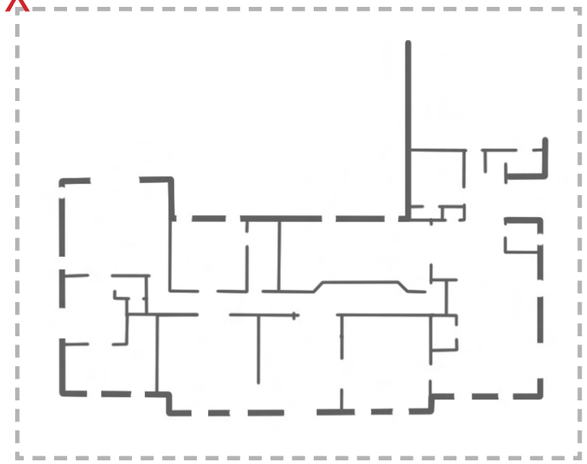
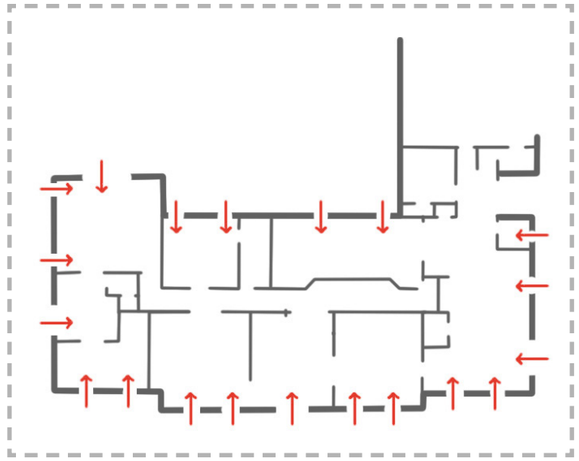
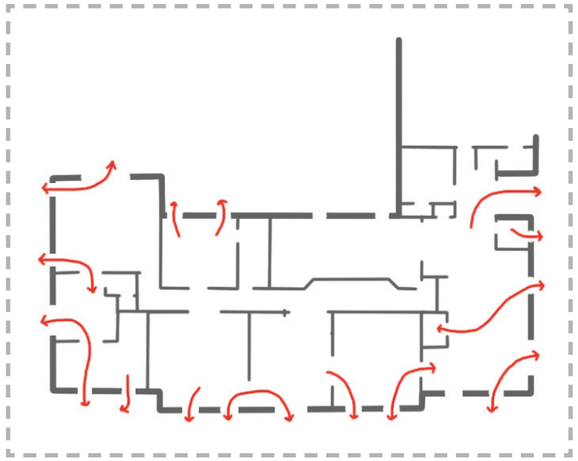


Traditional Colonial Bungalow plan

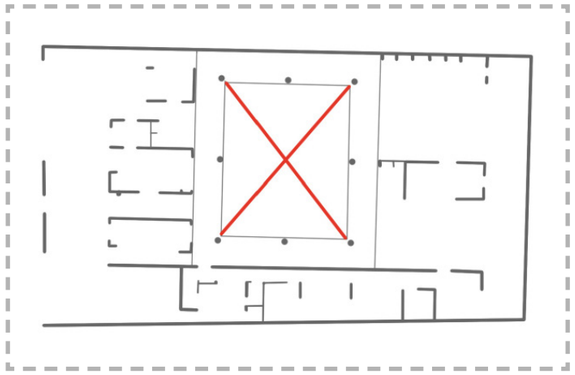


Lack of Privacy due to multiple openings facing the street

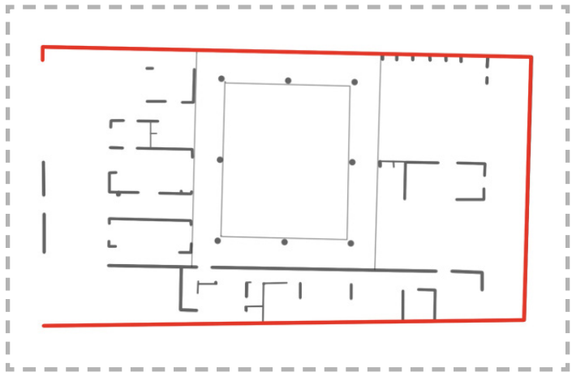


Weak or absent cross ventilation

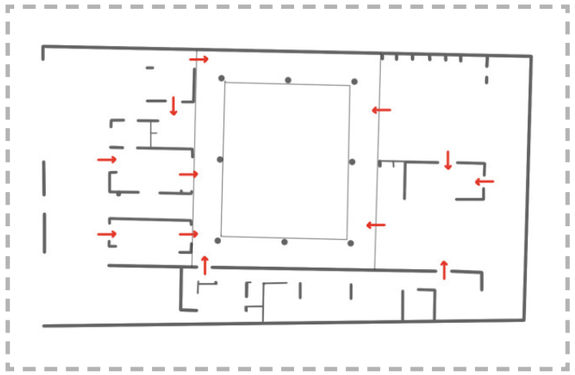
She demanded tradional Kandyan features



Central Courtyard (Meda Midula)



Enclosing Perimeter wall



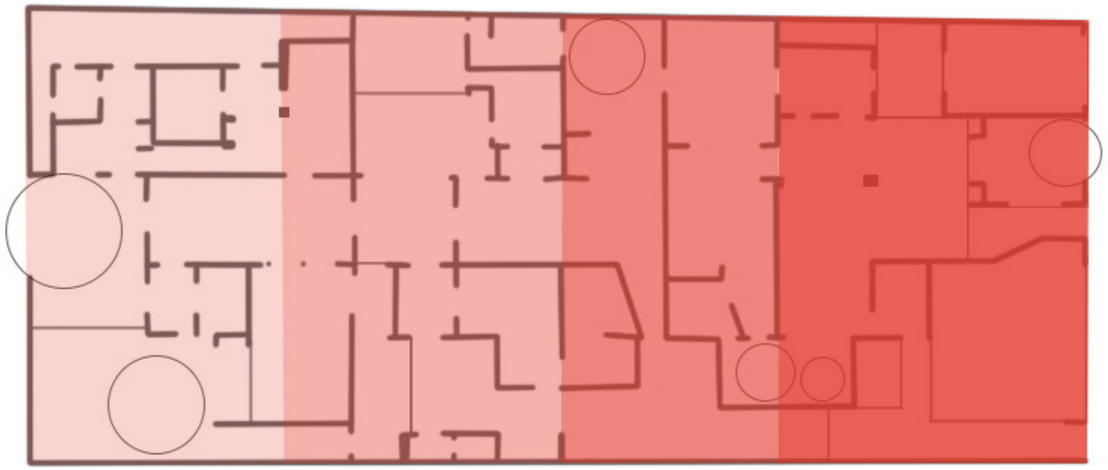
Inward looking openings

Solitude here is necessitated by context

01 INTENT

HOUSE 11 1958-1970

- Not a singular object
- Gradual acquisition and synthesis of four small suburban bungalows



- Conceived as a pied-à-terre
- Absorbed into a family house

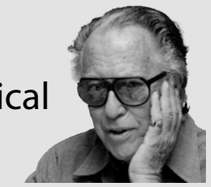
Solitude here is self-authored, not context-forced.

- Space is assembled incrementally
- Void precedes mass in moments

- Architecture grows through addition, overlap, and adjustment
- Privacy is not fixed, but continually renegotiated through movement

Solitude here is an emergent condition, produced through time, layering, and lived experience.

"I find it impossible to describe the exact steps in an analytical or dogmatic way."



— Geoffrey Bawa
(quoted in David Robson, Geoffrey Bawa: The Complete Works)

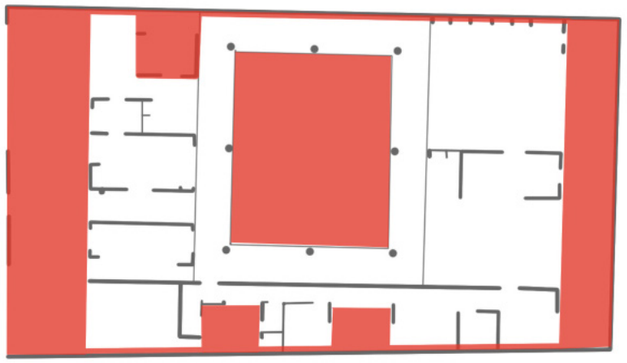
"An introspective labyrinth of rooms and garden courts creating the illusion of infinite space."

— David Robson, 2002

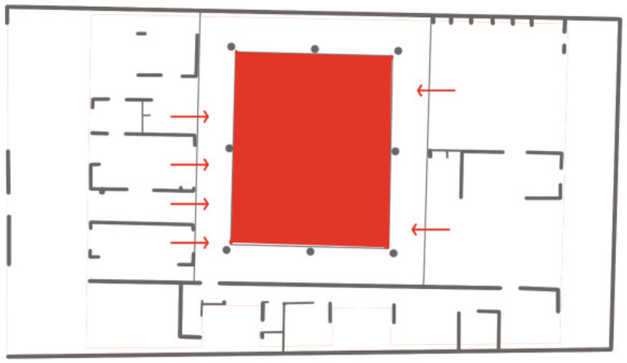
02 POINTS OF RELEASE

ENA DE SILVA HOUSE 1960-1962

Source: Geoffrey Bawa: The Complete Works; graphic overlay by Prarthana Puri



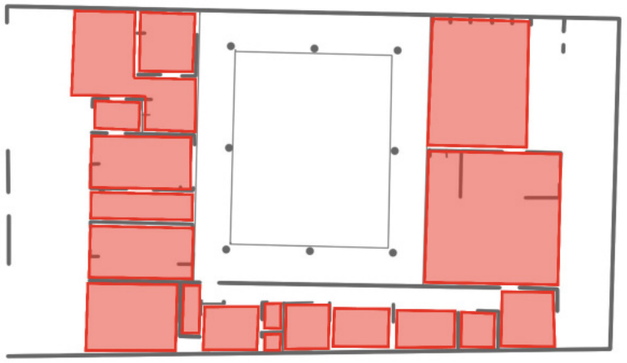
Single dominant point of release: the central courtyard (meda midula)



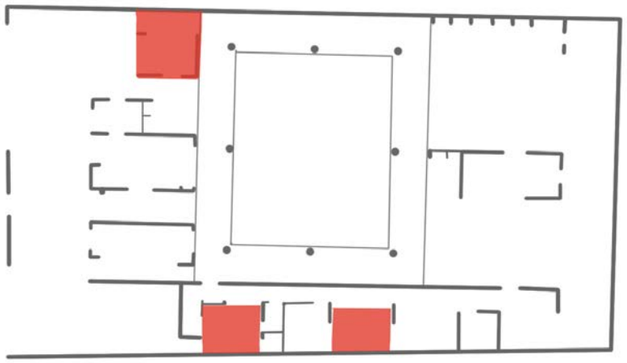
All experiences of openness, light, air, and nature are channeled inward toward one focal void.

View from courtyard towards the entrance

The main courtyard



Arrangement of small courts and pavillions around the single central courtyard



Secondary courts act as breathing pockets, but do not compete with the central court.

View from living room to the courtyard

Courtyard Detail

Solitude here is centripetal, everything turns inward to a shared yet private centre.
Release is hierarchical, not distributed.

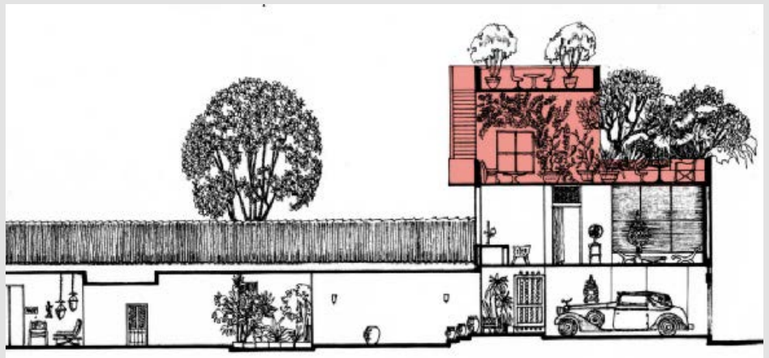
02 POINTS OF RELEASE

HOUSE 11 1958-1970

- Multiple garden courts dispersed throughout the house.
- No single focal void dominates, instead, release is encountered repeatedly and unexpectedly.

- Release is multiple, layered, and non-hierarchical.

- The roof terrace in House 11 functions as a vertical point of release

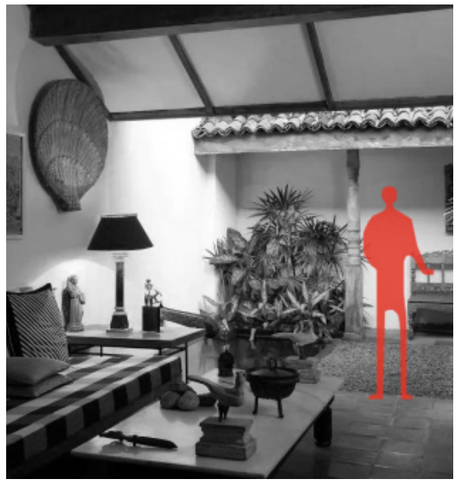


- The top level opens out to distant views across treetops and toward the sea. This shift from enclosure to exposure is not abrupt, but earned through movement and elevation.

Solitude is found in distance rather than enclosure, achieved by rising above the city instead of confronting it.6

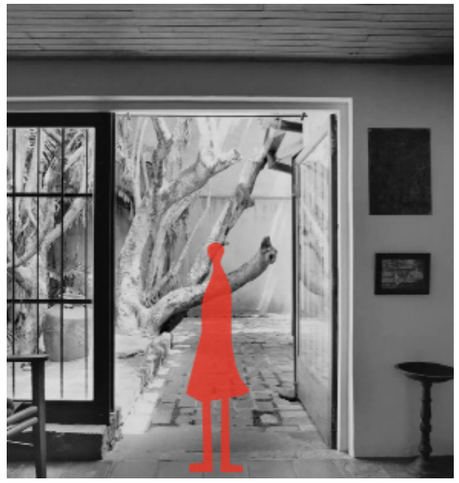
Source: Arheyes; graphic overlay by Prarthana Puri

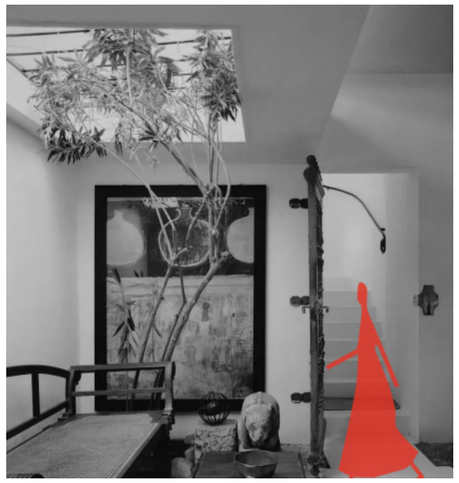
Courtyards, lightwells, verandahs, and pools interrupt built form repeatedly, preventing the house from ever reading as a solid mass



Walls do not simply enclose space, nor do openings fully expose it

Instead of openness as visual access to the outside world, Bawa creates openness as experience



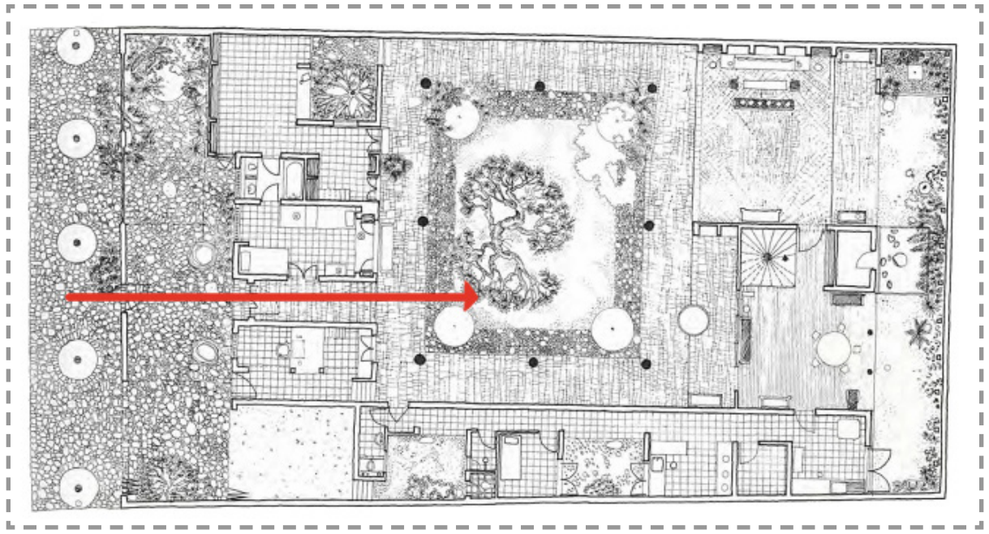


Solitude here is calibrated through spatially ambiguity, allowing withdrawal without disconnection

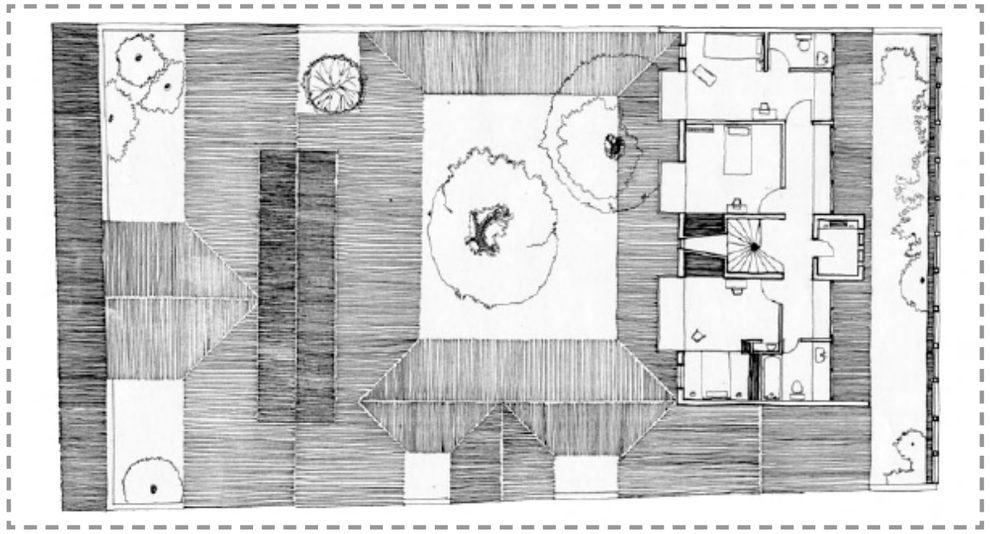
03 EDGES AND THRESHOLDS

ENA DE SILVA HOUSE 1960-1962

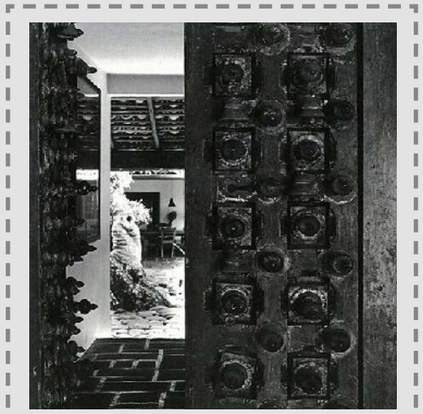
Multiple Layered Thresholds

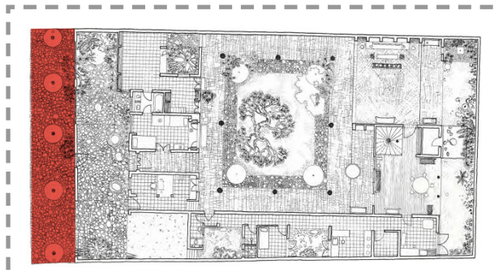


Roof Plan

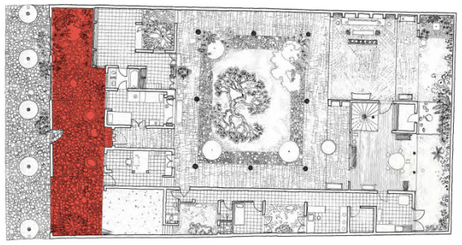


Source: Geoffrey Bawa: The Complete Works

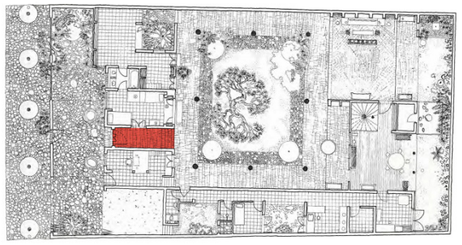




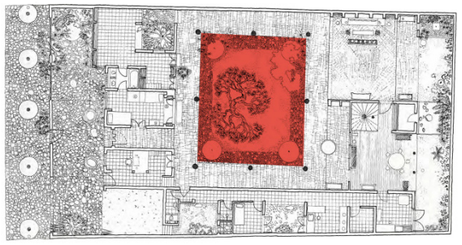
Garden Court



Transverse Courtyard



Narrow Passage



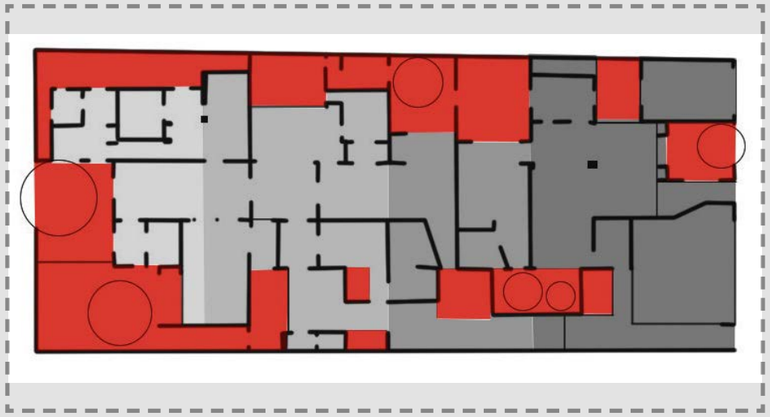
Central Courtyard

Views from main courtyard to entrance

Solitude here is produced through thickened edges and sequential thresholds that slow movement and mediate entry.

03 EDGES AND THRESHOLDS

HOUSE 11 1958-1970



- The original limits of each of the four bungalows were deliberately dissolved.

- Walls were removed, courtyards inserted, rooms opened to verandahs, and circulation paths layered over time.

- Verandahs act as rooms, courtyards function as interiors, and lightwells replace windows.

Solitude here emerges through the erosion of fixed boundaries and the continuous re-negotiation of inside and outside.

Source: Arheyes

Boundaries are therefore constantly renegotiated through light, air, and movement rather than enforced through solid walls.

Edges of House 11 are soft and porous. Instead of acting as defensive lines, they operate as zones of overlap where one condition gradually transforms into another

Thresholds are not singular points of entry or exclusion; they occur repeatedly and subtly, through shifts in ceiling height, changes in light intensity, turns in circulation, or the insertion of landscape and water.

08

BECOMING, NOT BEING:
On the Identity of the Srilanka

Group 8
Krittika, Shalaka, Preyash, Zainab

Sri Lanka's architectural identity does not emerge as a single lineage but as a slow accumulation of layers shaped by climate, belief, invasion, craft, and everyday life. Ancient Buddhist settlements, rock-cut temples, and sacred cities established a spatial ethic rooted in nature, stillness, and continuity. Colonial and contemporary influences did not replace this foundation but settled alongside it, creating a collage rather than an evolution. In the modern period, Geoffrey Bawa emerges as a conscious response to this condition, framing a tropical modern identity drawn from indigenous principles. Yet this consolidation raises questions: when identity becomes curated through one language, does it clarify a nation's character, or risk fixing something that was always meant to keep becoming?

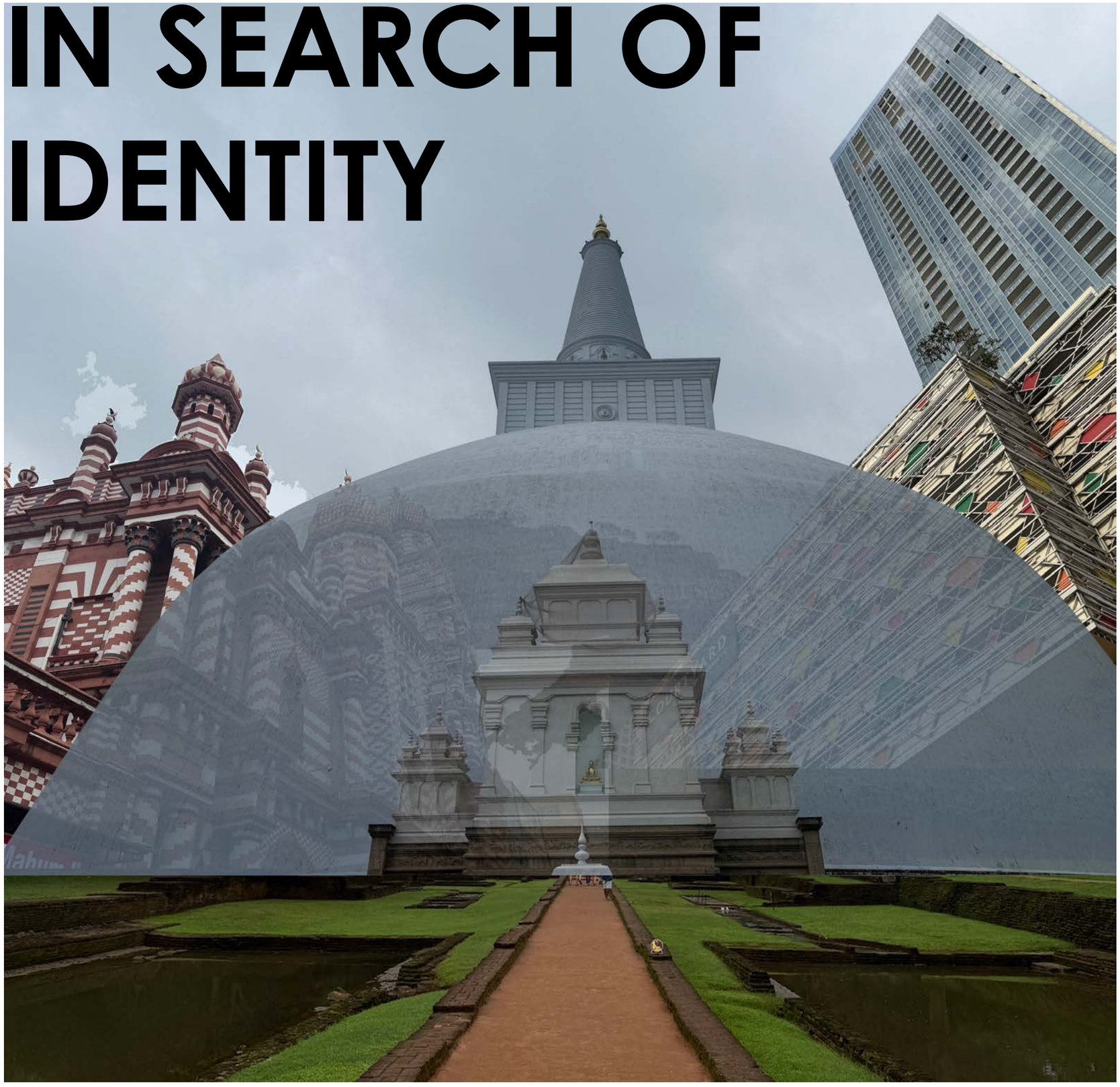
08a

Palimpsests and the Pursuit of Identity

Krittika Agarwal | UAR22108

When Sri Lankan architecture is observed today, it does not reveal itself as a single, continuous lineage. Instead, it appears as a collage assembled gradually over time, where ancient, colonial, and contemporary architectures coexist not through linear evolution but through accumulation. These layers do not resolve into unity; they persist in overlap, producing a landscape defined by tension rather than clarity. Within this condition, architecture is shaped by a series of dualities : permanence and adaptation, inheritance and imposition, continuity and rupture. Identity emerges not from a singular language belonging to place, but from the negotiation between these oppositions. Sri Lankan architecture is thus less an origin to be traced than an outcome to be read, formed unknowingly through time, survival, and adjustment.

IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY



SriLankan architecture reveals itself as a palimpsest rather than a linear tradition. Across time, spatial systems have been layered, interrupted, and reinterpreted, producing an architectural identity defined by overlap rather than continuity. Ancient sites such as Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa demonstrate a territorially scaled architecture where urban form, hydraulic infrastructure, and ritual space operated as a single system.

Dago-bas functioned as visual anchors within an orthogonal yet porous planning framework, while tanks, canals, and forest buffers regulated microclimate and social life. Architecture here was infrastructural, civic, and climatic, embedded within the landscape rather than objectified upon it.

This spatial intelligence intensifies at Sigiriya Rock, where topography becomes structure. The rock itself acts as plinth, wall, and datum, with terraces, water gardens, and axial processions carved directly into geological mass. At the Dambulla Cave Temples, architecture retreats further into the rock, replacing constructed enclosure with subtractive spatial formation. Painted vaults, low compressive ceilings, and ritual thresholds produce an interiority shaped by material permanence rather than applied form. These pre-modern examples articulate identity through section, terrain, and cosmology rather than style.

Colonial architecture interrupts this continuity by introducing object-based typologies, rigid axial planning, and imported material systems. Instead of replacing earlier spatial logics, colonial forms coexist with them, creating a layered condition of unresolved overlap. Post-independence architecture inherits this fractured terrain.

Geoffrey Bawa's work emerges as a critical attempt to negotiate this condition. In House No. 11, the urban courtyard house is reassembled through a sequence of compressed thresholds, light-wells, and staggered floor plates. Load-bearing masonry walls coexist with modernist free planning, while controlled apertures and inward-facing courts recall both Kandyan domestic typologies and colonial verandah houses. Similarly, the De Saram House employs deep overhangs, timber screens, and internal courts to modulate light, ventilation, and acoustic privacy, particularly around the central music room, transforming programmatic necessity into spatial hierarchy.

At Lunuganga, Bawa's most personal project, architecture dissolves into landscape through axial alignments, framed vistas, and topographical manipulation. Built form becomes episodic pavilions, terraces, and retaining walls, suggesting continuity with ancient garden cities, yet stripped of their civic and infrastructural scale.

This is where the overlap becomes evident. While Bawa abstracts historical principles like courtyard planning, threshold modulation, climatic responsiveness that he largely omits the collective, monumental, and political dimensions embedded in sites like Anuradhapura or Polonnaruwa. His architecture operates through atmosphere rather than systems, experience rather than territory.

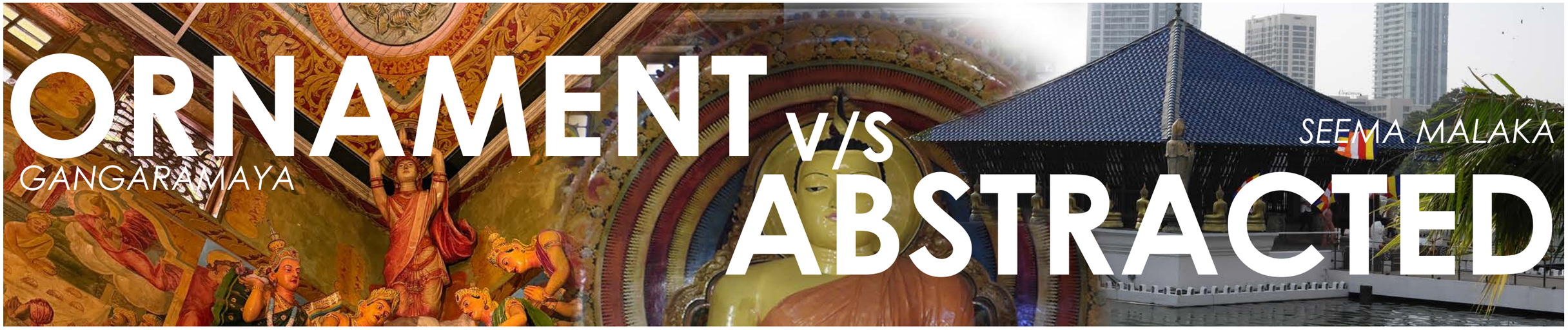
Sri Lankan architectural identity, therefore, remains unresolved. It exists in the friction between ancient spatial intelligence, colonial imposition, and modern reinterpretation. Bawa does not recover the past in full; he curates it. The challenge ahead lies in moving beyond formal synthesis toward reintegrating the infrastructural, social, and symbolic depth that once defined architecture on the island.

READING THROUGH DUALITIES

Sri Lanka reveals itself through opposites that never settle. Territory stretches wide and infrastructural, while singular objects rise with intent. Ancient temples anchor belief to ground and ritual, as high-rise cities climb toward speed, capital, and density. What is built to endure stands beside what learns to adapt. Ornament accumulates, abstraction withdraws. These conditions do not replace one another; they coexist, pressing against each other across time and landscape. To read Sri Lankan architecture is to move between these forces. Identity does not announce itself in monuments or skylines, but forms quietly in the space between permanence and change. It is shaped by repetition, erosion, and reuseby what holds its ground and what yields. In this tension, architecture does not arrive at clarity. It becomes.

DOMINANT v/s DISAPPEARANCE
SIGIRIYA
KANDALAMA HOTEL

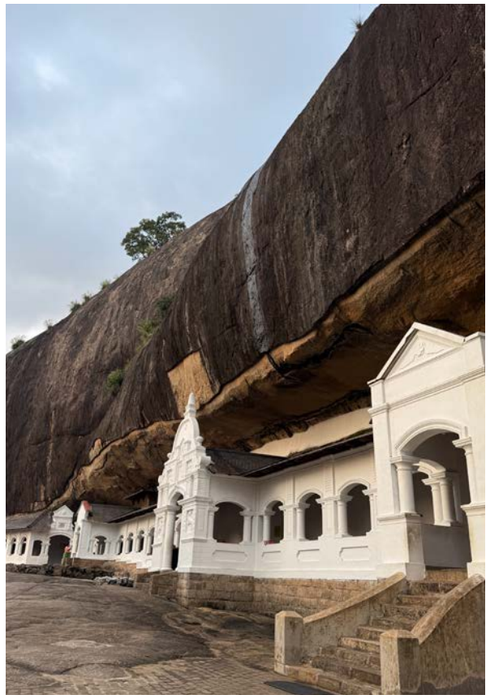
INWARDNESS v/s OUTWARD LOOKING
HOUSE NO.11
GALLERY CAFE


ORNAMENT v/s ABSTRACTED
GANGARAMAYA
SEEMA MALAKA

In Anuradhapura, architecture spreads.
Water finds its paths first,
tanks stitched to canals,
monasteries resting within distance.
Stone agrees to ground,
and the city survives byw becoming
landscape,
measured not in height,
but in reach, rhythm, and return.

At Sigiriya, architecture interrupts.
A single rock rises against the plain,
cut, climbed, commanded.
Gardens tighten into terraces,
steps insist on ascent,
power concentrates into mass and height.
Here, architecture declares itself
by standing apart.

Anuradhapura endures by dissolving.
Sigiriya asserts by standing alone.
One is system, the other symbol.
Between territory and object,
between spread and rise,
Sri Lanka learns its architecture:
not by choosing,
but by holding both.



Subtractive

Dambulla Caves

At Dambulla Cave Temples, architectural identity emerges through inward accumulation rather than outward expression. Space is carved from living rock, allowing geology to perform as structure, enclosure, and memory. Layers of pigment, ritual practice, and devotion settle gradually, embedding belief into the cave surface itself. Unlike Dutch architectural philosophy, which asserted identity through geometric order, façades, and visual control, Dambulla resists legibility and dominance. Darkness, compression, and stillness replace symmetry and projection. Architecture here does not announce presence; it withdraws. Identity is not imposed through form or image, but absorbed through repetition, touch, and time. In Dambulla, identity persists as depth, quietly sustained within stone, rather than declared upon the landscape.

At Polonnaruwa, architectural identity emerges through order, alignment, and assembly. Unlike the inward, subtractive logic of Dambulla, Polonnaruwa constructs space additively, stone placed upon stone to establish axes, hierarchies, and procession. Palaces, monasteries, and reservoirs are arranged with deliberate geometry, projecting authority across the landscape. Here, identity is not absorbed into depth but articulated through clarity and control. Yet this order is not rigid. Climate erodes edges, vegetation interrupts alignments, and ruins soften intention. What remains is a layered condition where planning logic coexists with decay. Identity at Polonnaruwa is neither purely monumental nor fully dissolved; it persists between structure and erosion, between designed order and the slow rewriting of time.

Polonnaruwa

Additive

AGED

Built in the Interim

I enter space where lines give way,
Where walls remember yesterday.
Stone holds the ground, brick learns to lean,
Concrete dreams of what has been.

Nothing is lost, nothing departs,
Each layer rests on older parts.
Foundations whisper what they knew,
As newer floors are laid askew.

In section, time is carved in shade,
Steps cut in rock, then slowly fade.
Courts sink low where water stays,
Rooflines soften monsoon days.

A fort draws edges firm and tight,
A shrine releases air and light.
Between them lies the lived-in seam,
Neither whole nor torn between.

Thresholds stretch where inside thins,
Verandahs teach the house to breathe within.
Shade redraws what walls propose,
And wind completes what form foregoes.

No single hand, no final plan,
Just space remade by use and man.
Rule inscribed, then overwritten,
Order blurred where life has written.

I look for form that claims its name,
A fixed intent, a stated aim.
But every place I try to see
Is learning how to simply be.

Identity arrives too slow,
It trails behind the space we know.
Not built to be, nor meant for seeing,
Just layered ground, still becoming.

Quest for identity

At Colombo, the expectation of identity is unavoidable. As the capital, it should project a coherent architectural image, one that represents the nation to itself and to the world. Instead, Colombo reveals something more unsettled. Temples stand beside high-rise towers, colonial bungalows press against glass façades, informal housing lines arterial roads, and traffic knots these fragments together. Rather than clarity, the city offers collision.

Colombo is shaped by accumulation, not composition. Each building answers a different authority, economy, or urgency, resulting in a landscape without hierarchy or pause. Sacred and secular, historic and speculative, domestic and infrastructural occupy the same ground without negotiation. Planning attempts are repeatedly interrupted by growth, climate, and occupation. Nothing fully replaces what came before; everything remains, compressed into proximity.

In a city that should embody national identity, architecture instead exposes contradiction. Colombo does not resolve Sri Lanka's layered histories, it amplifies them. The capital becomes a mirror of unresolved forces rather than a symbol of unity. Identity here is not announced through form or order; it is produced through friction. Colombo does not present an answer to what Sri Lankan architecture is. It reveals the difficulty of becoming one.

Order and Overload

Reading Kandy and Colombo

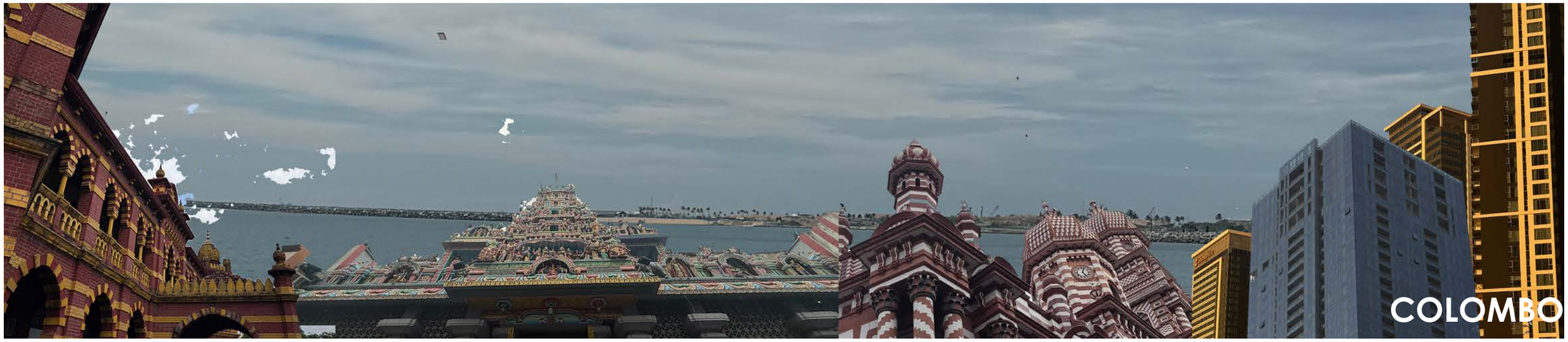
Kandy and Colombo sit at opposite ends of Sri Lanka's urban imagination. In Kandy, architecture is organised through belief. The city unfolds as a ritual landscape, structured by cosmology rather than efficiency. The Temple of the Tooth, the lake, the palace, and the surrounding hills are not isolated objects but parts of a spatial order where movement, procession, and hierarchy are clearly legible. Architecture here does not compete for attention; it aligns itself within a larger system of meaning. Streets curve with terrain, rooflines remain measured, and scale is calibrated to ceremony. The city is read slowly, through repetition and ritual, where identity is reinforced through continuity.

Colombo, by contrast, abandons ritual order in favour of metropolitan urgency. As the capital, it should offer a coherent architectural image, yet it operates through density, speed, and collision. Temples coexist with towers, colonial bungalows with speculative high-rises, informal settlements with infrastructural megastructures. Unlike Kandy's carefully aligned relationships, Colombo's elements press against one another without hierarchy. Sacred spaces survive not because they structure the city, but because they resist erasure. Architecture here is shaped less by cosmology and more by capital, traffic, and adaptation.

The contrast between the two cities reveals a fundamental duality in Sri Lankan architectural identity. Kandy represents a condition where space is organised around shared belief and collective memory. Colombo reflects a condition where architecture responds to competing demands, economic, political, and social,without a unifying spatial logic. One is ordered through meaning; the other is produced through negotiation. In Kandy, architecture guides behaviour. In Colombo, behaviour reshapes architecture.

Yet this opposition is not a simple loss. Colombo's chaos exposes a contemporary reality that ritual order alone cannot address. It reveals a nation negotiating modernity, density, and global influence without fully abandoning the past. Meanwhile, Kandy's coherence risks becoming static, preserved rather than lived. Between these extremes lies the ongoing question of identity.

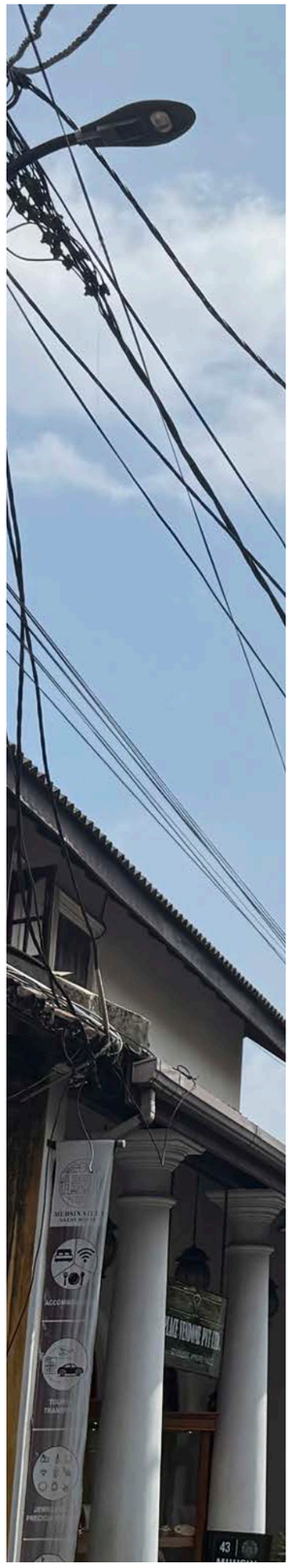
Sri Lankan architecture today oscillates between these two conditions: between cosmology and congestion. Identity is no longer secured through sacred order alone, nor fully expressed through metropolitan form. It emerges instead in the tension between them. Kandy shows what it once meant to belong to a shared spatial logic. Colombo reveals what it means to survive without one. Between ritual and chaos, architecture does not arrive at resolution. It continues unevenly, urgently, and unfinished.

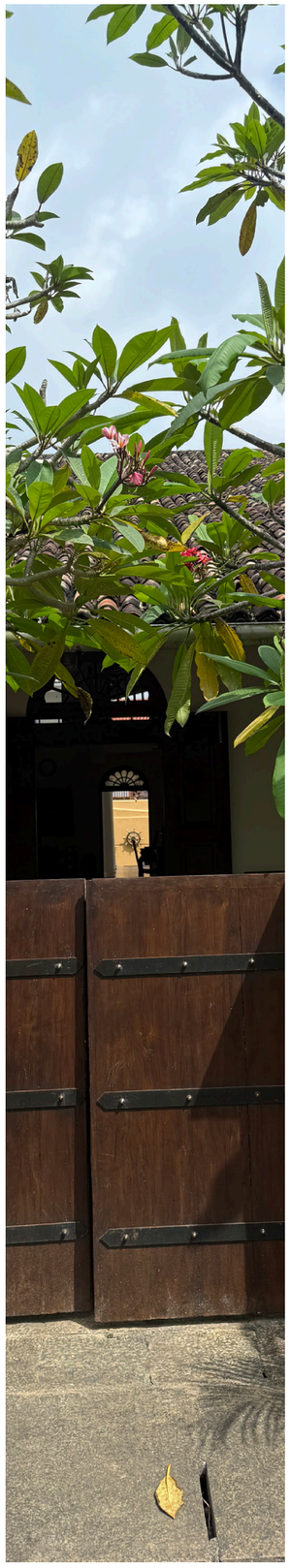


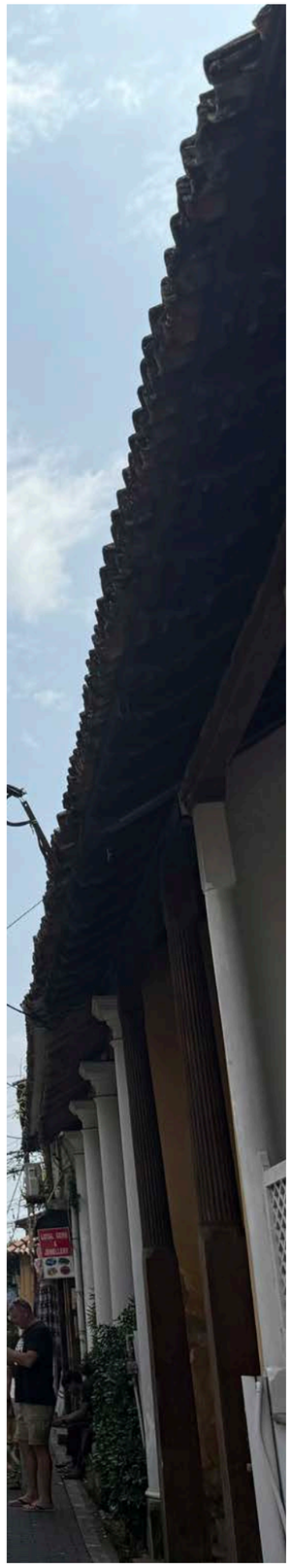
LAYERING---LAYERING---LAYERING---LAYERING

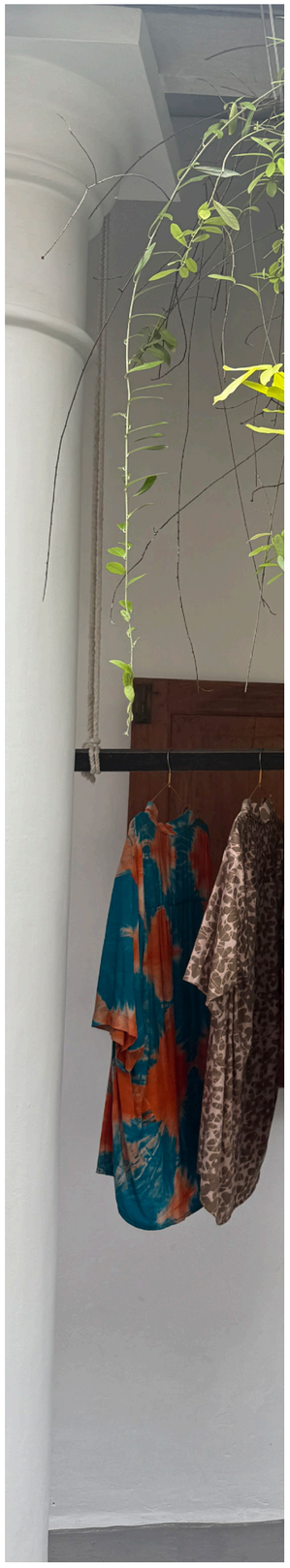
Galle, A Palimpsest

In Galle, my search for identity destabilizes.
Walls establish datum, then relinquish authority.
Defensive geometries attenuate into circulation,
enclosed volumes absorb revised programs,
and material edges negotiate climate and occupation.
Nothing is erased, only overwritten.
Plans recalibrate, sections are re-inhabited.
What I read as identity does not precede form;
it accumulates as residue
architecture sustained not through fixity,
but through continuous becoming.



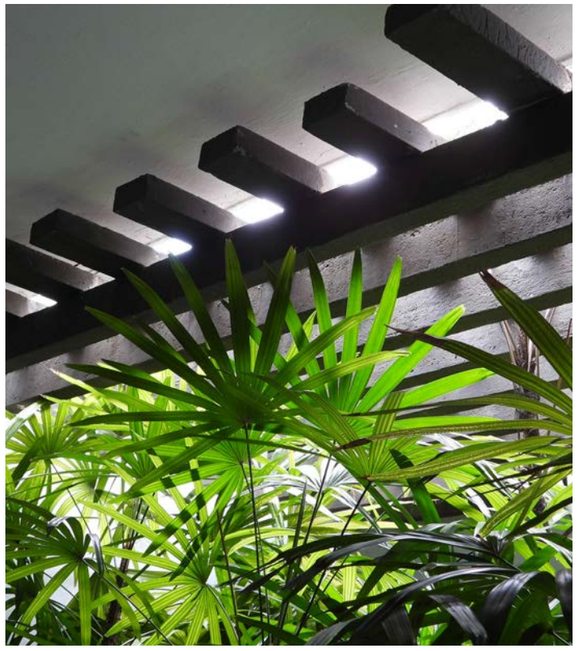


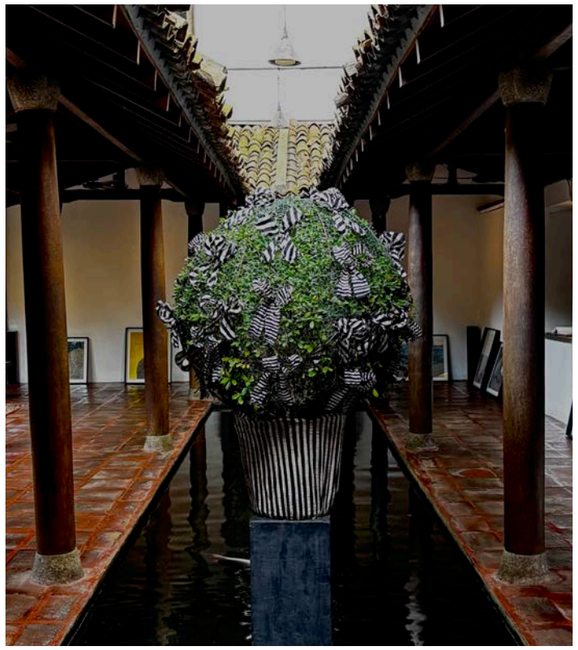




HOUSE NO.11

At House No. 11, Geoffrey Bawa positions identity as an inward, lived condition rather than a public image. Embedded within the dense fabric of Colombo, the house deliberately rejects façade-making and turns away from the street. Instead, it constructs a sequence of courtyards, light wells, and layered thresholds, allowing space to unfold gradually through movement. Compression and release choreograph daily life, making experience not form the primary architectural register. Material restraint is central to this approach. Whitewashed walls, brick, timber, and stone respond sensitively to light, humidity, and time. Surfaces are allowed to stain, weather, and soften, recording occupation rather than resisting it. Climate completes the architecture, turning texture into a quiet narrator of place. Rather than reproducing historical forms, Bawa abstracts local spatial logics: courtyard living, shaded transition, inward orientation, into a modern domestic language. House No. 11 does not claim to represent Sri Lanka symbolically. It suggests instead that identity is cultivated through use, adaptation, and restraint, formed slowly within space rather than projected outward as image or style.





At Gallery Cafe, Geoffrey Bawa explores identity through reuse, openness, and social life. Once a private residence, the building is neither restored nor reinvented; it is carefully adapted. Walls, courtyards, verandahs, and pools are retained and reprogrammed, allowing the house to shift from domestic retreat to public gathering without losing its spatial character. Identity here is not fixed to original use, but extended through occupation. Space unfolds fluidly between inside and outside. Vegetation, water, and shade dissolve enclosure, while textures : aged plaster, timber, stone, carry traces of time and use. Rather than presenting a formal façade, the Gallery Café privileges sequence and atmosphere, encouraging lingering, conversation, and pause. Architecture becomes a backdrop for everyday life rather than an object of display. In the context of Sri Lankan identity, the Gallery Café suggests that continuity lies in adaptation. History is not preserved as artifact, nor erased for novelty, but absorbed into contemporary life. Through this quiet transformation, Bawa proposes an identity shaped less by form and symbolism, and more by reuse, climate, and the evolving patterns of social inhabitation.

GALLERY CAFE

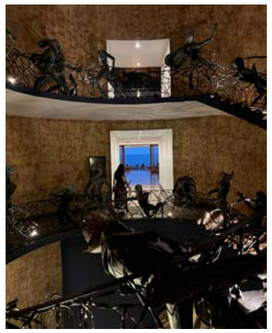
Geoffrey Bawa understood that identity is felt before it is recognised. His architecture speaks through texture : rough plaster catching shadow, timber worn smooth by touch, stone darkened by rain and time. Materials are never pristine; they age, stain, and soften. Walls breathe, floors absorb footsteps, and surfaces register climate as a collaborator. In Bawa's work, texture becomes a quiet narrator, allowing buildings to belong to their place without declaring a style.

MATERIALS

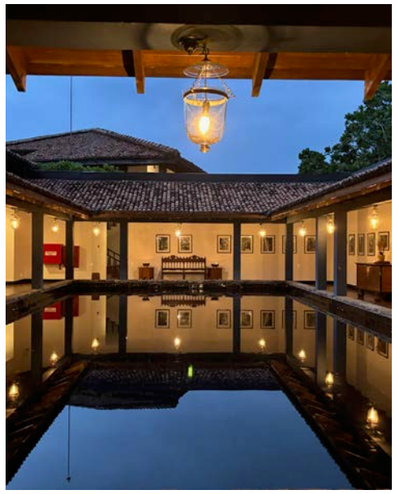
TEXTURES

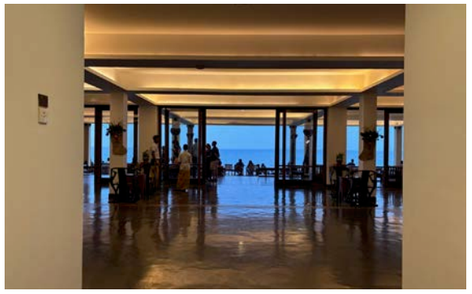
"Bawa never redesigned the board; he learned how to move within it."

Yet this mastery is also selective. Bawa curates texture to produce atmosphere which is calm, a retreat, intimacy rather than to expose the full historical weight of place. His surfaces reconcile modernism with climate, but they do not carry the infrastructural or civic textures of ancient Sri Lanka. Identity, in his hands, becomes experiential rather than systemic: sensed in shade and tactility, not fully embedded in territory or time.



JETWING HOTEL





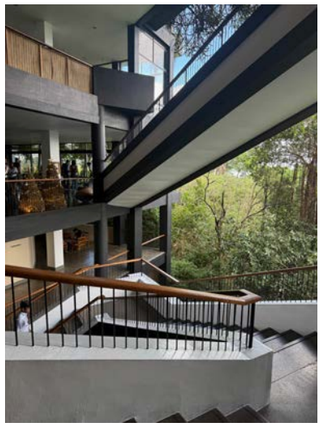
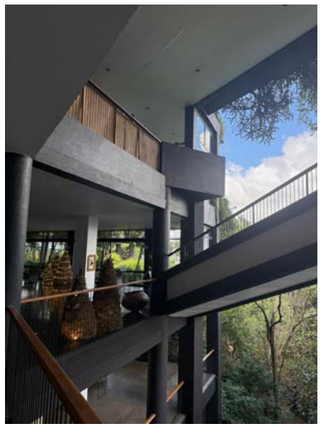
At Jetwing Hotel, Geoffrey Bawa approaches identity as an experiential condition rather than a visual statement. The hotel is structured through movement: courtyards, shaded corridors, pools, and verandahs that blur the boundary between interior and landscape. Architecture is encountered in sequence, guided by climate, light, and airflow rather than façade or monumentality. Identity is felt through pause, shadow, and openness, not announced through form.

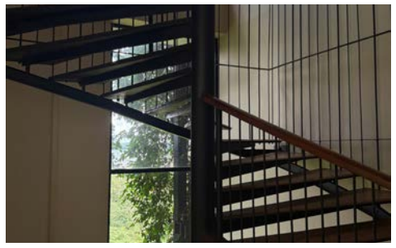
Jetwing reflects Bawa's broader position on Sri Lankan identity: atmospheric, climate-responsive, and carefully mediated. Textured materials, deep overhangs, and porous planning allow the building to belong to its environment without reproducing historical styles. Tradition is abstracted into spatial generosity and comfort, translating cultural memory into inhabitable experience. Yet this identity is selective. Jetwing frames Sri Lanka through retreat and leisure, detaching architecture from the civic, infrastructural, and social systems that shaped earlier landscapes. Identity here is refined and intimate rather than collective or territorial. Through Jetwing, Bawa does not define Sri Lanka; he curates a fragment of it, one that is sensed through movement and climate, and negotiated through comfort rather than confrontation.

At Kandalama Hotel, Geoffrey Bawa pushes the question of identity further by attempting near-disappearance. The hotel stretches horizontally along the cliff edge, refusing monumentality and instead aligning itself with topography. Concrete is allowed to weather, darken, and absorb vegetation, turning material into a register of time rather than a finished surface. Architecture here is read in section through terraces, corridors, and framed views rather than as an object in the landscape.

Kandalama presents identity as camouflage. Climate, vegetation, and terrain are not conditions to respond to but forces to submit to. The building recedes visually, allowing landscape to dominate perception while architecture operates quietly in the background. Locality is not expressed through form or symbolism, but through restraint and endurance.

Yet this gesture is also carefully curated. Kandalama abstracts Sri Lanka into an image of ecological harmony, detached from everyday habitation or civic life. Identity is experienced as atmosphere and spectacle rather than lived system. Through Kandalama, Bawa suggests that Sri Lankan architecture can belong by withdrawing but the question remains whether disappearance alone can carry the full weight of identity.



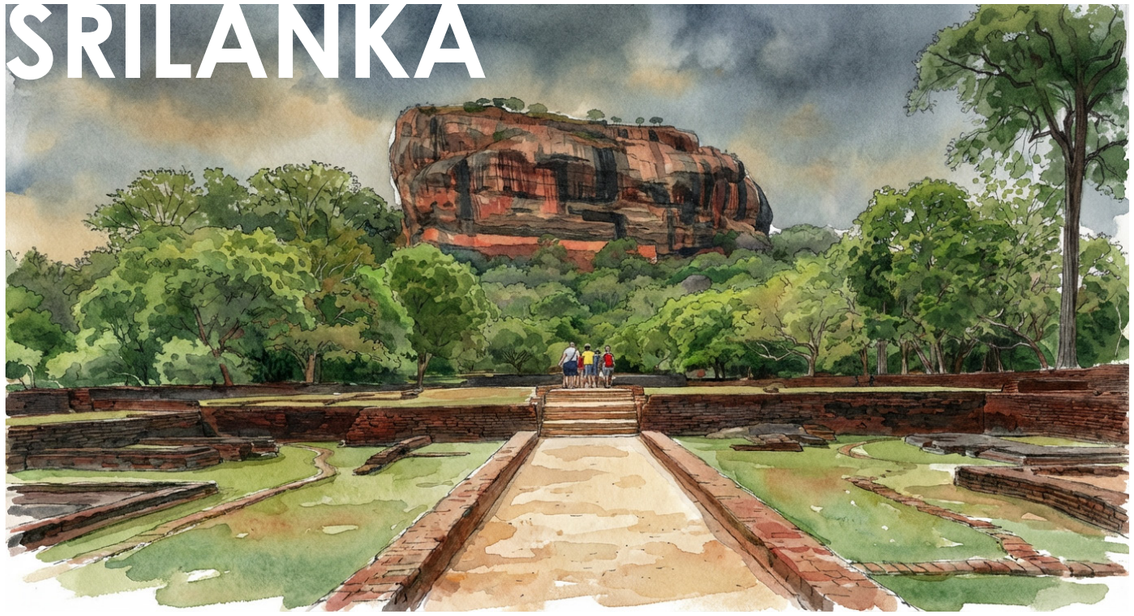
KANDALAMA HOTEL

STILL IN SEARCH...

This project does not arrive at an answer to Sri Lankan architectural identity; instead, it remains suspended within the search itself. What initially appeared as a quest for coherence gradually unfolded as a reading of overlaps, collisions, and unresolved layers. Ancient infrastructures, colonial frameworks, modern interventions, and contemporary pressures do not replace one another—they persist together, producing an architecture shaped by accumulation rather than resolution. In this condition, identity refuses clarity.

Reading Sri Lanka through dualities, territory and object, permanence and adaptation, ritual order and metropolitan congestion raises further questions rather than conclusions. Can identity exist without hierarchy? Is it found in systems that endure, or in forms that adapt? Does it reside in sacred landscapes structured by belief, or in cities shaped by density, speed, and negotiation? When modern architects attempt to mediate history through climate and texture, are they revealing identity, or carefully curating it?

As the capital city collides and ancient sites persist, the question remains open: should SriLankan architecture aspire to coherence, or accept contradiction as its most honest condition? Perhaps identity is not something to be recovered from the past or projected into the future, but something that surfaces only in moments of tension between monument and landscape, order and chaos, intention and occupation. If identity is always an outcome, never an intent, then the search cannot end. It must continue...



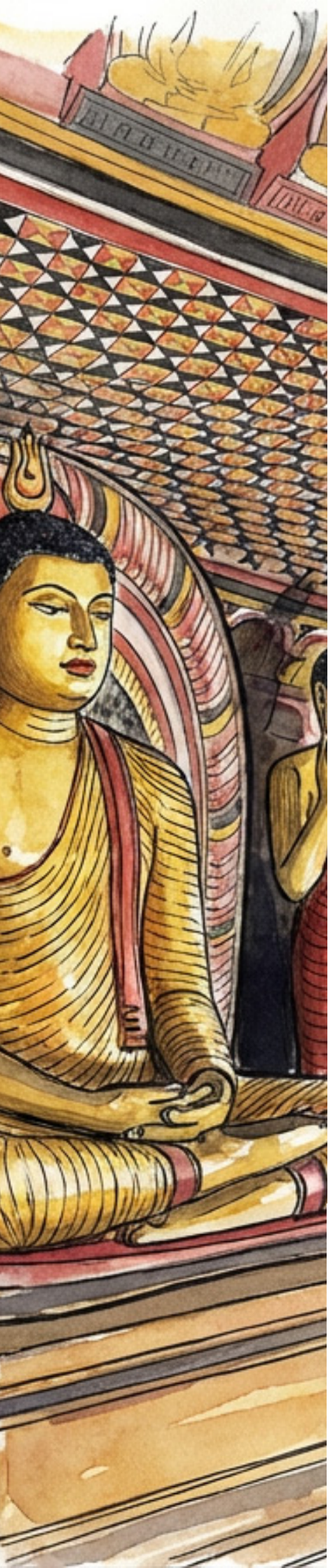
INDIGENOUS PARADIGM

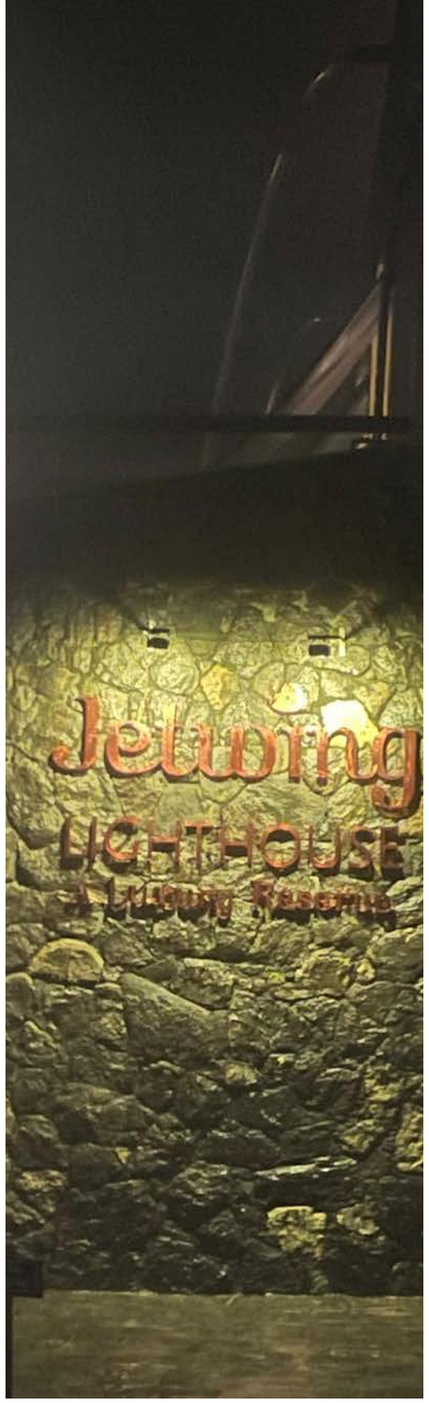
ZAINAB FATMA | PUM25439

The SWS unfolded as a journey into the Indigenous Paradigm of Sri Lankan architecture, where spaces are shaped by climate, culture, and everyday living rather than imposed form. As the journey moved through cities and landscapes, architecture revealed itself quietly—through shade, light, movement, and moments of pause—responding naturally to place and time.

Across different sites, the journey highlighted how indigenous ways of building continue to influence architecture, from ancient settlements to tropical modernism. What stood out was not just how buildings looked, but how they were felt—how they guided movement, created comfort, and connected people to the land around them.

This booklet brings together personal observations recorded through writing and photography. It follows architecture as it is experienced in motion, shaped by shifting light and changing spaces. Courtyards, thresholds, and landscapes come together to form a continuous narrative, reflecting an architecture rooted in lived experience, patience, and a deep connection to environment.





SriLanka

Sri Lanka attracts people not simply as a destination, but as a way of understanding architecture through experience. The journey reveals an approach where buildings do not compete for attention, but quietly respond to climate, culture, and everyday life. From Colombo's inward-looking residences and civic spaces, visitors begin to see how courtyards, shade, and ventilation shape comfort and privacy within dense urban settings.

As the journey moves inland, architecture becomes increasingly inseparable from landscape. At Dambulla, space is carved rather than constructed, demonstrating that form, light, and silence alone can create powerful spiritual experience.

In Kandy, the city unfolds through ritual, topography, and movement, revealing an urban form shaped by culture rather than imposed planning. This understanding deepens at Kandalama and Lunuganga, where architecture recedes into landscape and space is revealed slowly through paths, views, and water.

People are drawn to Sri Lanka not just to see buildings, but to learn how architecture listens where space is lived and shaped by land, climate, people, and time rather than image or form.

In the Shade of Bawa's Sky....

I came to an island warm and wide,
Where buildings breathe and gently hide.
They do not shout, they do not strive,
They live, they listen, they arrive.

Homes open slow to light and air,
With courtyards green and moments rare.
In filtered sun and shifting day,
I felt the calm of Bawa's way.

Roofs lean low, verandahs stay,
Holding the heat and glare at bay.
Where shade is drawn and walls are free,
Space learns to move with land and tree.

Water rests by stone and sky,
Cooling the hours passing by.
No form demands, no lines impose,
Just time, and light, and paths he chose.

I climbed the rock, the earth my guide,
Where steps were shaped by hill and tide.
And in that climb, so still, so slow,
I sensed what Bawa seemed to know.

That buildings need not rise or claim,
Nor seek to leave a lasting name.
They stand where breeze and silence meet,
Where ground and gesture feel complete.

I sat by the sea as the daylight waned,
Hearing the hush where the tide remained.
No words were left, no thoughts to say,
Just breath and waves at the close of day.

The journey ended where waters knew
How to soften all I once outgrew.
I came back changed in a quiet way,
Leaving one self by the shore that day—

- By Zainab Fatma

The Kandalama Hotel

At Heritance Kandalama, architecture is experienced not as an object viewed from afar, but as a sequence of spaces meant to be absorbed slowly. Designed by Geoffrey Bawa, the hotel appears to emerge from the landscape rather than sit upon it. Its long, linear form follows the natural contours of the site, allowing the surrounding forest to remain dominant while the building quietly recedes into its setting.

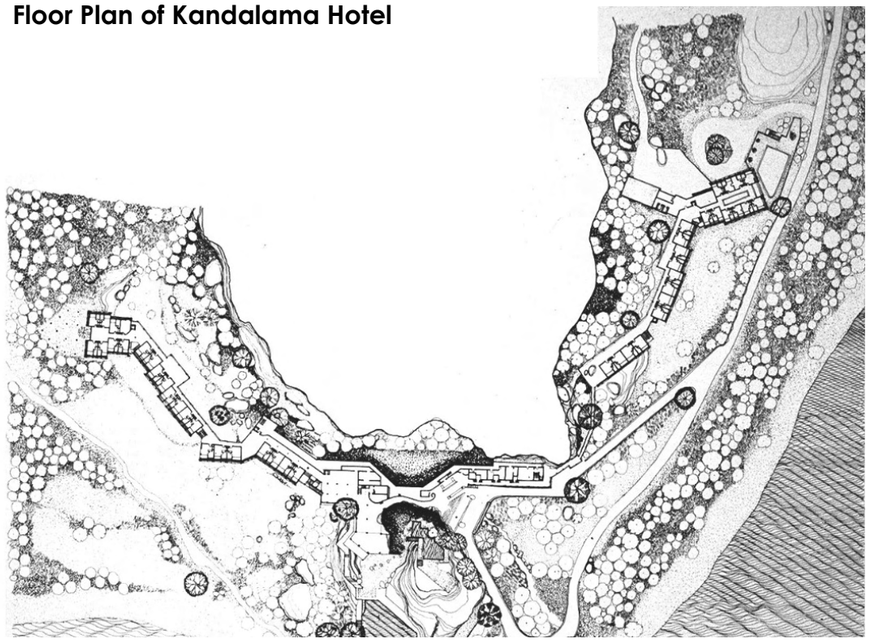
As one moves through the corridors, there is a continuous connection to nature. Creepers, trees, and dense vegetation soften the edges of the structure, blurring the boundary between inside and outside. Light enters gently, filtered through greenery and deep overhangs, creating calm, shaded interiors that respond naturally to the climate. Spaces unfold gradually, encouraging slow movement and moments of pause.

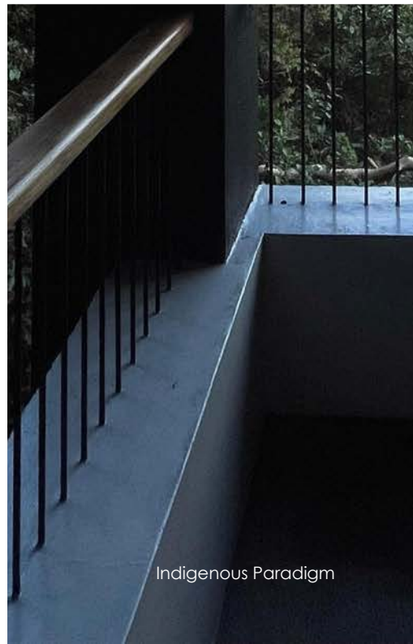
Most striking is the sense of restraint and humility in the architecture. The hotel does not compete with the historic and natural presence of Sigiriya; instead, it complements it. Kandalama demonstrates that meaningful architecture does not need to dominate its surroundings. It can exist quietly, enhancing the experience of place while allowing nature, light, and time to lead.

This approach also reveals a deep sensitivity to climate and ecology. The building relies on passive strategies such as cross-ventilation, shaded corridors, and deep overhangs to maintain thermal comfort, reducing dependence on mechanical systems. Water bodies, vegetation, and orientation work together to cool the microclimate, reinforcing the idea that environmental responsiveness is central to the design rather than an added feature.

Equally important is how movement through the hotel is carefully choreographed. Circulation spaces are treated as experiential zones rather than mere connectors, offering framed views, shifts in light, and moments of stillness. This slow unfolding of space encourages awareness and reflection, turning everyday activities into encounters with landscape. Through this, Kandalama demonstrates an architectural philosophy rooted in restraint, observation, and respect for place.

Floor Plan of Kandalama Hotel





Where built form quietly blends into the landscape it inhabits.

Kandalama Hotel by Geoffrey Bawa is situated within Sri Lanka's Cultural Triangle, embedded between a man-made reservoir and a centuries-old forest. Completed in 1994, the hotel offers an immersive experience of the surrounding landscape, framing expansive views toward the Sigiriya rock fortress.

Geoffrey Bawa, the mastermind behind the hotel's design, envisioned the structure to blend seamlessly with the surrounding environment. It was not meant to stand out but rather to quietly assimilate. On approach, the Kandalama hotel is hardly visible, hidden behind the surrounding foliage and integrated into the mountainside. From a distance, it appears as an extension of the natural landscape, disappearing into the contours of the land.

Bawa's concept for the hotel was based on the idea of a man-made 'cave' like structure, akin to the region's natural rock formations. The hotel is built using locally sourced materials, with walls that seem to rise directly from the ground and rooftop gardens that extend the natural landscape onto the structure itself. The design of the hotel unfolds organically with ramps, bridges, and passages that connect different areas, encouraging visitors to explore and connect with their surroundings.

At Heritance Kandalama, Geoffrey Bawa carefully oriented the building to open out toward three key directions, each framing a different landscape experience:

Sigiria Rock

One primary axis of the hotel is oriented toward Sigiriya Rock. This view connects the building visually and culturally to Sri Lanka's ancient landscape and history, allowing the monument to remain a constant reference point. This axial view establishes a strong visual anchor, grounding the hotel within the historic and cultural memory of the site.

Dambulla Rock

Another opening faces the Dambulla rock formation, reinforcing the relationship between the hotel and the region's sacred and geological landmarks.

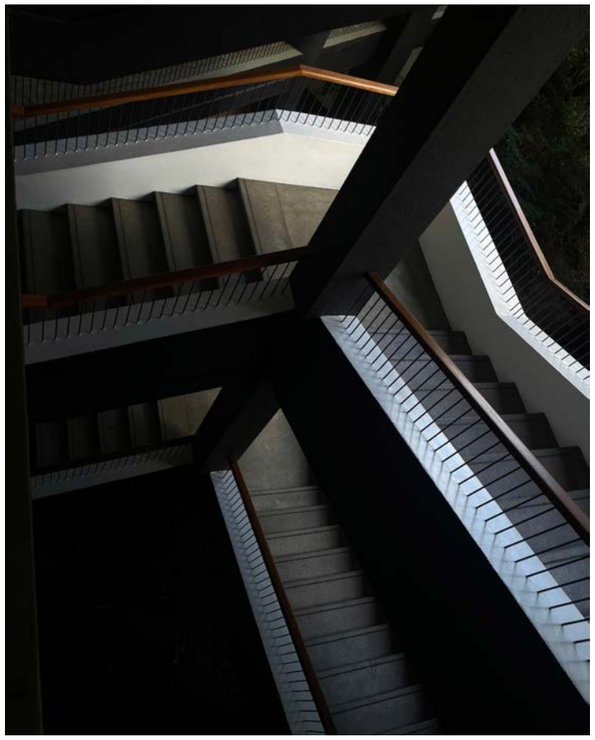
Kandalama Lake

The third orientation opens toward Kandalama Lake, bringing water, breeze, and reflected light into the experience, while also helping moderate the microclimate. This view aids passive cooling by bringing in breeze and reflected light from the water body.

Sigiria Rock

Dambulla Rock

Kandalama Lake



Light Shadow And Depth

Walking through this space, the staircase feels more like an experience than just a way to move between floors. The interlocking flights create strong diagonals, and as you move, different levels visually connect with each other, making the space feel layered and dynamic rather than static.

Natural light enters from the sides and softly washes over the steps and railings, reducing the need for artificial lighting. The open balustrades and vertical voids allow both air and light to move freely through the stairwell, strengthening the sense of spatial continuity and passive ventilation. The material palette is simple and honest—exposed concrete, metal railings, and wooden handrails—allowing structure and texture to take precedence over decoration.

Reflective Water Court

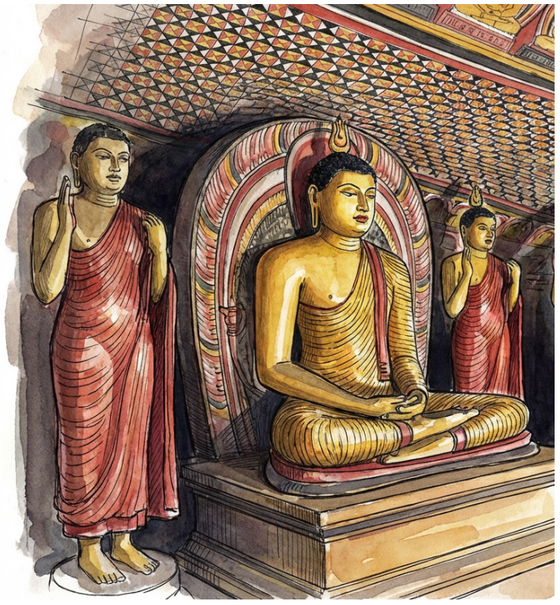
This image shows a reflective water body placed near the landscape edge, visually connecting the built space with Kandalama Lake beyond. The calm water surface mirrors the sky, trees, and surroundings, creating a quiet and open atmosphere. Although it appears to merge with the lake, the water element is clearly defined and controlled. It acts as a visual pause rather than a recreational pool. The water also helps cool the space and encourages people to slow down, observe, and connect with the landscape.

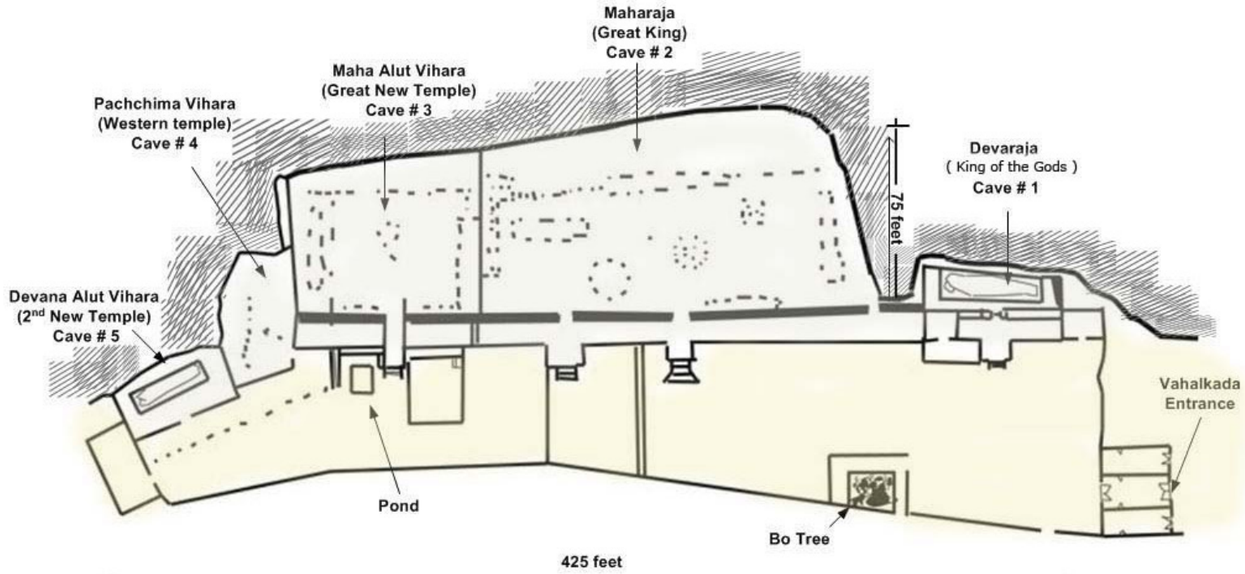
Dambulla Cave

Dambulla is centrally located between Kandy and Anuradhapura, within Sri Lanka's dry-zone plains. Its position makes it an important junction connecting major heritage sites such as Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa.

Dambulla Cave Temple stands as one of Sri Lanka's most remarkable cultural and religious landmarks, combining dramatic geography with centuries of artistic and spiritual history. The site is located in the heart of the island's Cultural Triangle, with Dambulla serving as an important link between historic cities and sacred landscapes. Approached from surrounding towns, the journey reveals expansive views of dry-zone plains, agricultural land, and low hills, gradually leading to the massive rock outcrop that defines the temple complex.

The cave temple is set atop a striking geological formation that rises sharply above the surrounding plains. The rock reaches an elevation of approximately 1,118 feet above sea level, while the land around it lies much lower, creating a powerful visual contrast. This natural prominence not only gives the site a commanding presence but also contributes to its sense of sanctity and isolation. The length and scale of the rock provide a dramatic backdrop for the temple, emphasizing the close relationship between natural landscape and sacred architecture.





Floor Plan of Caves of Dambulla Rock Temple

Sigiriya Rock

Sigiriya, also called Lion Rock, is an ancient rock fortress and archaeological marvel in Sri Lanka's Central Province. Sigiriya rises dramatically from the central plains of Sri Lanka, standing as a powerful reminder of the island's ancient history. Built in the 5th century by King Kashyapa, Sigiriya functioned as a fortified palace, carefully planned with gardens, water systems, and defensive pathways carved into rock. Its design reflects an advanced understanding of landscape, movement, and spatial control.

As one moves through Sigiriya today, the experience unfolds gradually through symmetrical gardens, rock-cut stairs, and framed views that expand with height. The ascent is not only physical but spatial, where architecture, terrain, and history merge. The rock itself becomes the architecture, guiding movement and shaping experience. Sigiriya is not simply a monument to be seen, but a journey to be experienced, where history, landscape, and space come together seamlessly.

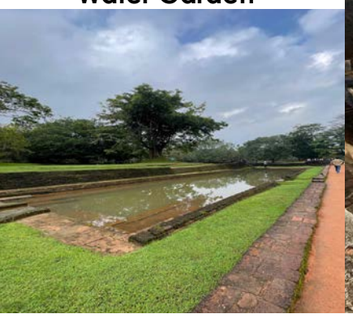
Sigiriya stands prominently above the central plains of Sri Lanka, reflecting the island's ancient history. Built in the 5th century by King Kashyapa, it functioned as a fortified royal palace with carefully planned gardens, water systems, and rock-cut pathways. Its design shows a strong understanding of landscape, movement, and spatial organization.

1. Outer Moat and Rampart
2. Mapagala Complex
3. Outer City
4. Inner Moat and Rampart
5. Entrances
6. Water Gardens
7. Boulder Gardens
8.Terrace Gardens
9.Mirror Wall and Paintings
10. Lion Platform
11. Palace at the summit
12. Inner City, Ramparts and Gates
13. Lake

Plan of Sigiriya city

Sigiriya is one of the best-preserved and most elaborate sites in South Asia from the first millennium A.D. Its layout is organised as a series of concentric precincts centred on the Sigiriya rock, a massive inselberg rising about 200 metres above the surrounding plain. The summit contains a stepped plateau housing the royal palace and gardens. Around the rock lies a walled citadel with terraced slopes and boulder gardens. To the west is a planned royal park with water gardens, moats, and ramparts, while the eastern precinct forms an inner city with earthen ramparts and gateways.

Water Garden



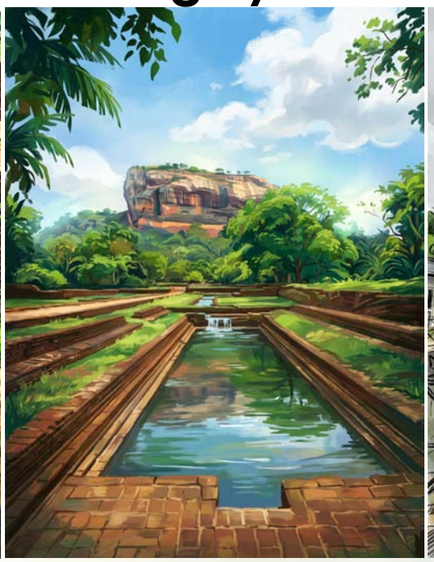
Sigiria Rock

This rock formation is known as the Naag (Naga) Rock at Sigiriya.

The rock gets its name from its serpent-like form, which resembles a raised cobra, a powerful symbol in Sri Lankan and South Asian traditions. The Naga represents protection, water, fertility, and guardianship of land. In ancient belief systems, Nagas were considered protectors of sacred places, especially those connected to water and earth.

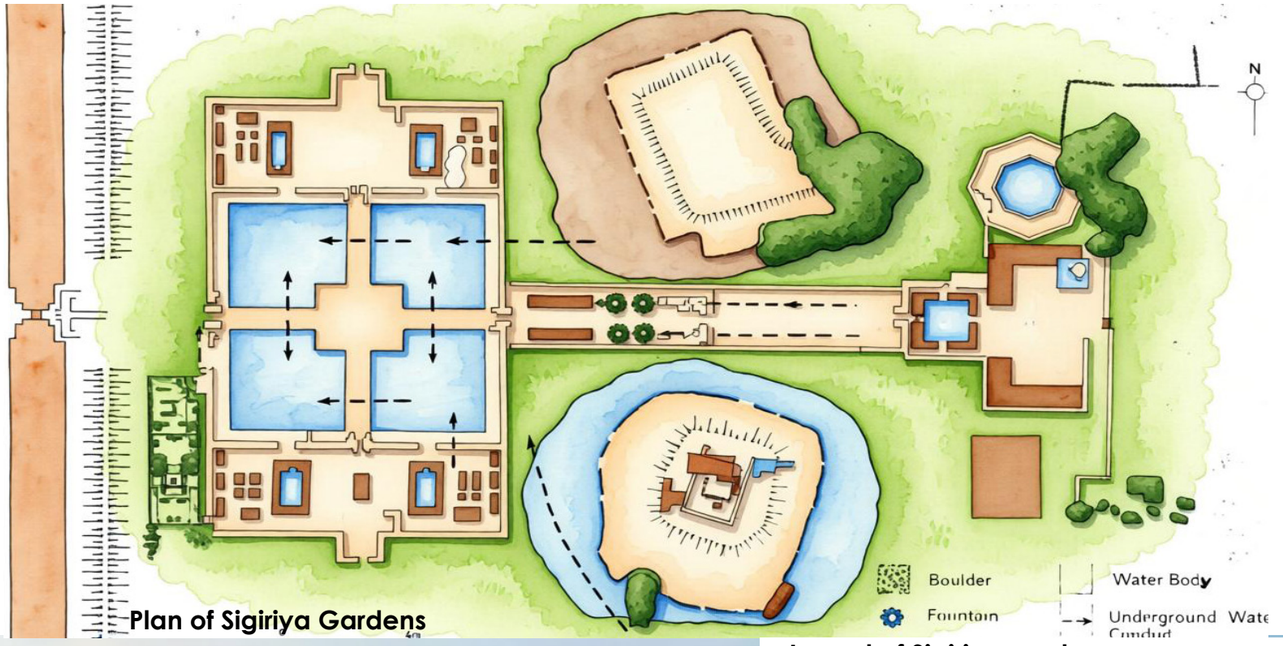
The Water Gardens of Sigiriya

Terrace Garden



Boulder Garden

Water Garden



Plan of Sigiriya Gardens

1-Water Garden |2- Boulder Garden|
3-Terrace Garden |4- Palace Rock

Where Rock Meets Garden....

From ancient plains, a giant rose,
Stone reaching sky, firm yet grand.
Its height asked courage, calm, and time,
A silent call to begin the climb.

The path grew narrow, breath ran slow,
Yet hope stayed near with every go.
Each step held faith, each pause felt true,
Drawn upward by the promise of view.

At the summit, the world lay wide,
Green and water side by side.
Gardens rested, still and clear,
Cooling the heart, calming the eye.

Breath returned, the noise fell low,
As time learned how to move more slow.
Between the rock and open sky,
The soul found rest, and learned why.

Layout of Sigiriya garden

The garden layout at Sigiriya is planned as a clear spatial sequence aligned along an east–west axis. The Water Gardens occupy the western zone, arranged symmetrically with pools, fountains, and underground conduits that control water flow and create a ceremonial landscape.

Moving east, the design shifts into the Boulder Gardens, where natural rock formations are integrated with paths, pavilions, and water features. Beyond this, the Terraced Gardens rise along the base of the rock, using retaining walls and stairways to guide movement upward toward the Lion Staircase and summit palace. The layout reflects a careful balance between geometry and natural terrain.

The Water Gardens at Sigiriya

The Water Gardens at Sigiriya are a remarkable example of ancient landscape design, aligned along a strong east–west axis and demonstrating advanced knowledge of symmetry and water management. **Garden 1** is the largest, organised around a central island and cardinally aligned causeways forming an early char bagh layout. **Garden2** actsasatransition,withterracesandan octagonal pool set against a massive boulder. **Garden 3** is formed by terraced slopes with retaining walls, linking the Boulder Garden to the Lion Staircase plateau and the route to the summit palace.

OF PARTS AND WHOLES

Shalaka Mujumdar UAR21200

Identity is never the intent; it is always the outcome. It is something assembled unknowingly, stroke by stroke, like a painter working across a vast canvas without ever stepping back to see the whole. Sri Lanka's architectural identity has emerged in this manner, shaped over centuries by its first civilisations, successive invasions, religious propagations, climate, craft, and personal authorship.

08b

Across the journey from Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa to Colombo and Bentota, architecture reveals itself not as a unified language but as an accumulation of fragments, each carrying residues of what came before.

This condition recalls the Ship of Theseus: if every component of a ship is replaced over time, does it remain the same vessel? Sri Lanka's architecture has undergone continuous replacement, adaptation, and reinterpretation, yet it continues to be recognised as itself. Identity here does not lie in permanence of form, but in continuity of evolution.

Buddhism forms a significant foundation of this continuity. Yet Buddhist architecture in Sri Lanka is not preserved as an untouchable relic. It behaves as a living organism. The Dambulla caves exemplify this condition, where paintings grow richer through layers added over centuries, and colonial and contemporary structures attach themselves without erasure. This acceptance of change, of growth without rupture, emerges as a defining cultural trait.

There exists, however, a paradoxical sense of stillness and motion. Architecturally, Sri Lanka often feels frozen in time, yet it is constantly evolving. Even its modernist identity draws deeply from traditional spatial principles, material sensibilities, and relationships to landscape. In doing so, it contradicts the fundamental premise of modernism as a break from history, producing a uniquely Sri Lankan condition.

It is within this layered context that Geoffrey Bawa emerges as a pivotal figure. Bawa's architecture is marked by a carved quality of space, fitting precisely into the niches of its surroundings. He operates as an exceptional curator, carefully selecting site, craft, collaborators, and objects. His buildings function as frames and containers - plain canvases that hold views, rituals, and atmospheres. Yet in assuming the role of the flagbearer of Sri Lanka's tropical modernist identity, Bawa also consolidates authorship in a way that is difficult to ignore.

This consolidation becomes most evident in the Parliament of Sri Lanka, a building meant to represent the political and cultural core of the nation. Its abstract, reductionist language resists specificity, offering neutrality where one might expect layered meaning. The adoption of materials such as copper roofing, removed from their original context of necessity in Anuradhapura, becomes symbolic rather than pragmatic, resulting in costly maintenance and raising questions of contextual appropriateness.

Since Bawa, much of Sri Lankan architecture appears to exist either in continuation of, reaction to, or critique of his work. The question then arises: why does the modern architectural identity of an entire nation rest so heavily on the language of a single individual? Has this dominance enabled clarity, or has it produced a form of stagnation, an image so well curated that it resists further evolution?

As an island, Sri Lanka evolves like a terrarium, self-contained, slow to change, yet profoundly altered when catalysed by external forces. Perhaps its architectural identity does not lie in any singular language, but in its ability to replace its parts while remaining recognisably whole.

Still, It Moves

No one named it as it grew,
It formed the way the rivers do.
Bending paths, a shifting course,
Carried by an unseen force.

Caves grew darker, paint on paint,
Time allowed to leave its taint.
What was sacred learned to change,
Never fixed, yet never strange.

An island waits with patient stone,
Skills arrived not once, but sown.
What lay silent found its voice,
Shaped by chance as much as choice.

Someone framed the heat and land,
Carved out shade with careful hand.
Built quiet walls that chose to hold,
The world outside, the days untold.

Yet when one voice begins to stand
For every place, for all the land,
The echo lingers, strong and clear,
While other sounds grow hard to hear.

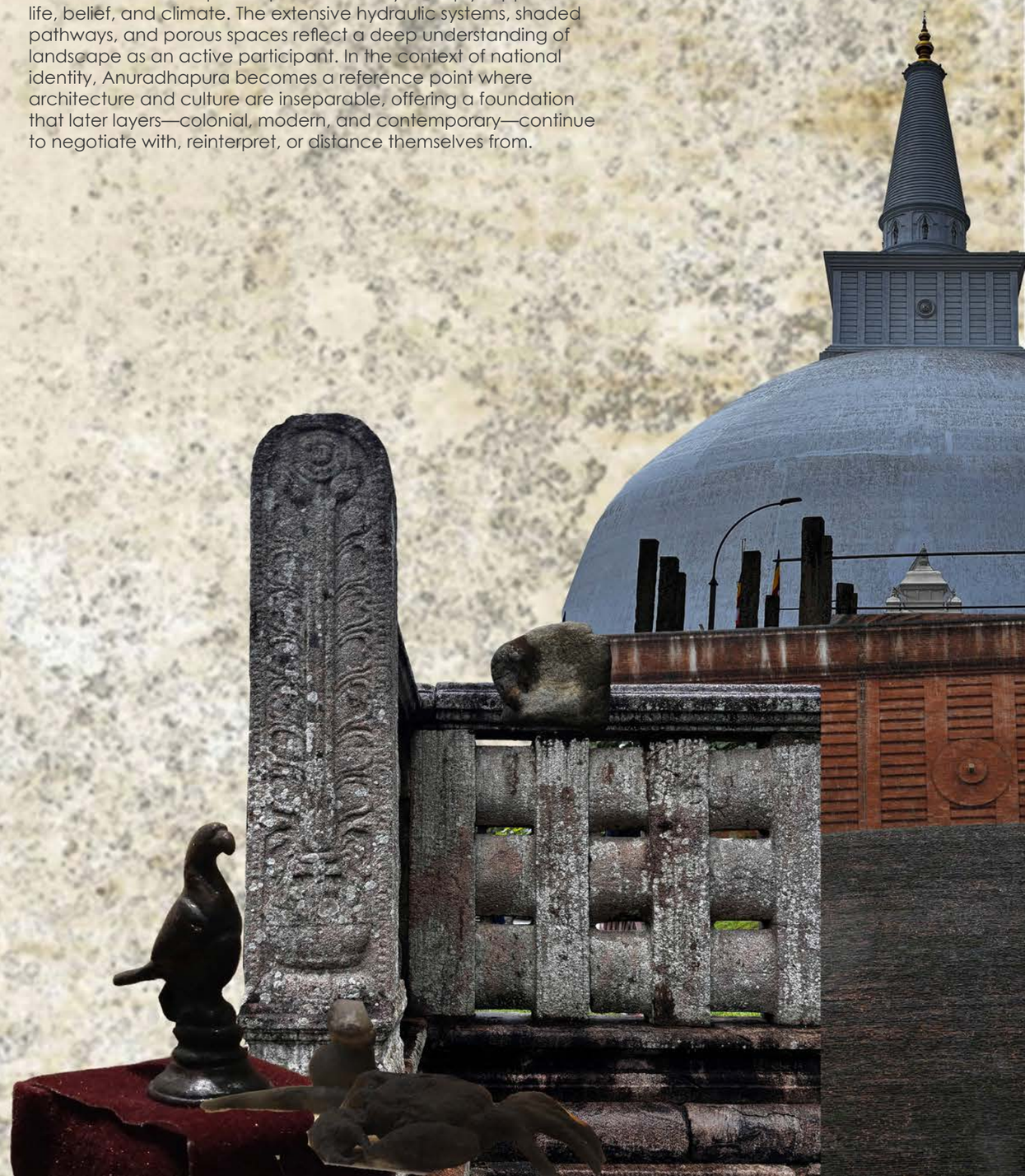
This place is not one form or plea,
But parts replaced continuously.
A ship that sails, yet stays the same,
Unfixed in shape, unnamed in name.

Ask it where it claims its home,
It will not stop, it will not roam.
It moves ahead, both near and far,
Becoming still what it already are.

Before identity learned its name,
it learned how to live.
Stone was placed where belief paused,
water held the sky in shallow basins,
and paths were drawn not to arrive,
but to slow the body down.
Nothing here asked to be iconic.
Time replaced parts, softened edges,
let copper fade and stone endure.
Yet the city remained itself,
not because it resisted change,
but because it never mistook change
for loss.

Anuradhapura represents one of the earliest moments where Sri Lanka's architectural identity began to take form, not through authorship or image, but through belief, necessity, and environment. As a sacred city shaped by Buddhism, its architecture is defined by restraint rather than monumentality. Monasteries, stupas, ponds, and moonstones establish a spatial order rooted in ritual movement, meditation, and coexistence with nature. Materials were drawn directly from what was available—stone, earth, copper—used not symbolically, but pragmatically.

What is most striking is the city's clarity of intent. Architecture here does not attempt to represent identity; it simply supports life, belief, and climate. The extensive hydraulic systems, shaded pathways, and porous spaces reflect a deep understanding of landscape as an active participant. In the context of national identity, Anuradhapura becomes a reference point where architecture and culture are inseparable, offering a foundation that later layers—colonial, modern, and contemporary—continue to negotiate with, reinterpret, or distance themselves from.



SIGIRIYA

Sigiriya marks a moment where architecture, power, and landscape become inseparable. Unlike Anuradhapura's restraint, Sigiriya is deliberate and authored. The rock is not merely occupied but transformed. Gardens are carved into terrain, water systems are engineered against gravity, and surfaces are painted to construct an image of authority. Yet even in its assertion of control, the architecture never detaches itself from nature. Built form negotiates with rock, wind, water, and height, acknowledging the landscape as both collaborator and constraint.

Within the larger question of Sri Lanka's architectural identity, Sigiriya complicates the narrative. It represents an early instance of architecture as image making and political expression, yet it remains deeply rooted in place and climate. Power here is not imposed through abstraction but through precise engagement with the land. Sigiriya suggests that identity can be simultaneously assertive and contextual, intentional yet inseparable from its environment, a tension that continues to surface across Sri Lanka's architectural history.

The rock was never conquered,

only persuaded.

Steps climbed power upward,

while water learned to fall back down.

Here, identity stood tall for a moment,

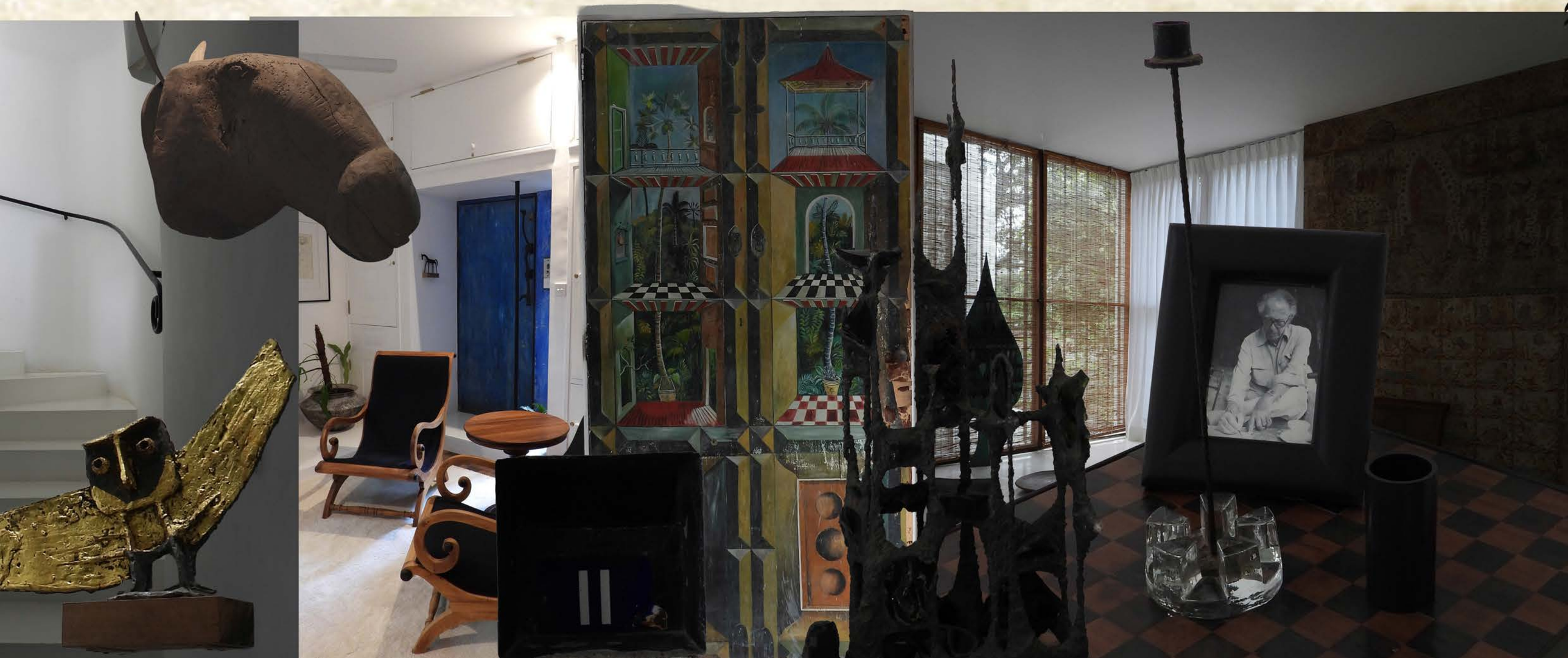
then returned to stone and sky.

HOUSE 11

House No. 11 does not present itself as a finished work of architecture. Instead, it exists as a continuous process of addition, removal, and refinement. Over decades, Bawa altered the house incrementally, absorbing neighbouring plots, reshaping courtyards, adjusting thresholds, and reframing light. The building became a record of time, habit, and intention rather than a single architectural moment.

In the context of Sri Lanka's architectural identity, House No. 11 reflects the idea of identity as outcome rather than intent. While deeply personal, the house also mirrors broader cultural tendencies of layering and adaptation seen across the country. Bawa's role here is not that of a monumental author but of a careful editor. Architecture becomes a container and a frame, holding objects, views, and atmospheres rather than asserting a dominant form. Yet this quiet control also reveals how strongly one individual's sensibility can shape the image of a nation's architecture, raising questions about authorship, representation, and whose identity is ultimately being framed.

Rooms arrived one by one,
never asking to be complete.
Light was invited, walls adjusted,
time allowed to stay.
A house learned how to grow inward,
until living itself became the plan.



KANDALAMA HOTEL

Kandalama Hotel represents a moment where Sri Lankan architectural identity is projected outward, framed deliberately for the global gaze. Embedded into the rock face overlooking the reservoir, the building appears restrained and recessive, allowing landscape to dominate the visual experience. The architecture withdraws, presenting itself as a backdrop for nature, while carefully choreographing views, movement, and moments of pause.

Within the larger narrative of national identity, Kandalama raises questions of representation and authorship. The project draws from indigenous spatial principles such as shade, water, and continuity with terrain, yet it is also a highly curated image of Sri Lanka, designed to be experienced by outsiders. Nature is not simply engaged but composed. While the building suggests humility toward the landscape, it also demonstrates how architectural identity can become staged, refined, and repeated. Kandalama thus sits at the threshold between rootedness and spectacle, between lived landscape and framed experience.

The building steps back,
and the land steps forward.
Silence is arranged,
views are carefully kept.
Nature appears untouched,
though every moment is held.

DE SARAM

De Saram House represents a quieter, more domestic translation of Sri Lanka's modern architectural identity. Designed within an urban Colombo context, the house turns inward, using courtyards, filtered light, and controlled thresholds to create privacy and climatic comfort. Rather than announcing itself to the street, the architecture withdraws, prioritising lived experience over visual expression.

Within the larger narrative of identity, De Saram House demonstrates how modernism in Sri Lanka adapts itself to everyday life. Traditional spatial ideas such as shaded interiors, layered thresholds, and gradual transitions between inside and outside are reinterpreted through a modern language. The house does not seek to represent the nation in a symbolic sense, yet it becomes part of the identity through repetition. As this domestic vocabulary is reproduced and referenced, it begins to define what Sri Lankan modern living looks and feels like, raising questions about how identity quietly forms through habit, comfort, and curated restraint.

The house turns away from the street,

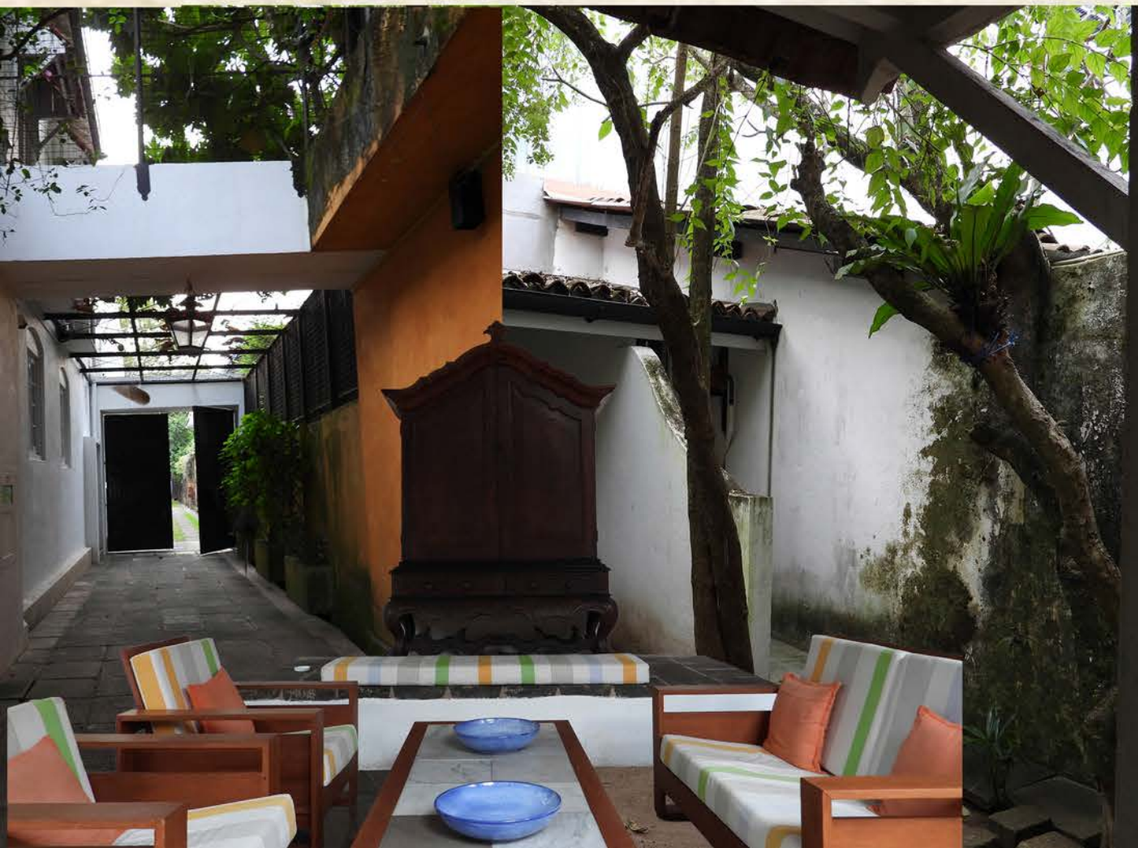
and listens to its own air.

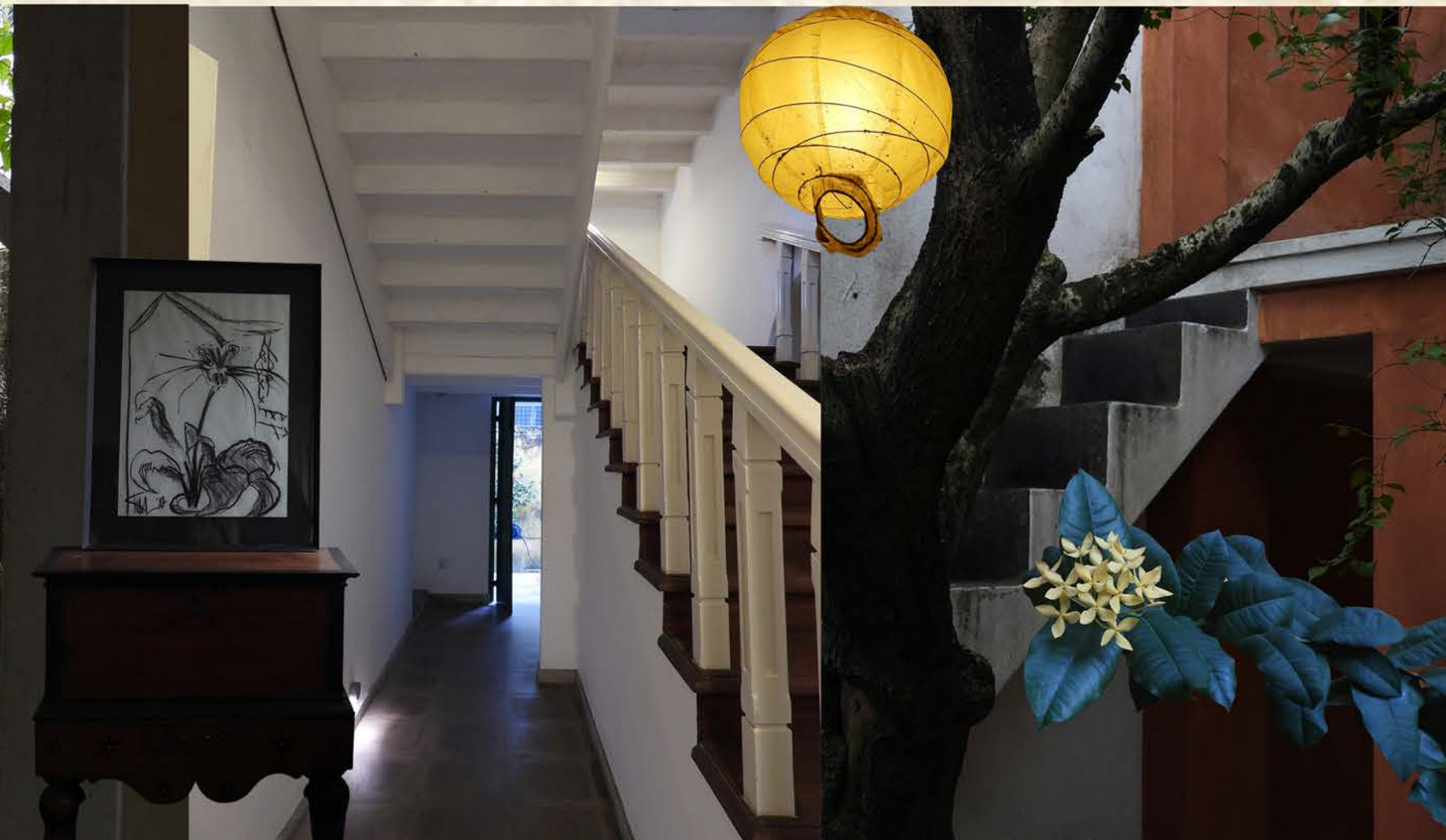
Light arrives slowly,

rooms breathe before they speak.

Here, identity settles into routine,

unnoticed, yet deeply learned.





LUNUGANGA

Lunuganga is not a single project but a lifelong act of editing. Shaped slowly over decades, the landscape was adjusted, framed, and re-framed through small, deliberate interventions. Paths shift, vistas open and close, objects are placed with care, and pauses are carefully choreographed. The garden does not grow freely, nor is it rigidly controlled. It exists in a state of continuous negotiation between nature and intent.

In the context of Sri Lanka's architectural identity, Lunuganga reveals how identity can be consciously constructed through curation. Indigenous relationships to landscape, water, and movement are present, yet they are filtered through a personal sensibility. Nature here is not simply experienced but composed. Lunuganga becomes a prototype for an architectural attitude where restraint, patience, and framing define place. At the same time, it raises a critical question. When identity is shaped so carefully by one hand, does it remain collective, or does it begin to reflect a singular vision repeated across the nation.

The land was never finished,

only adjusted.

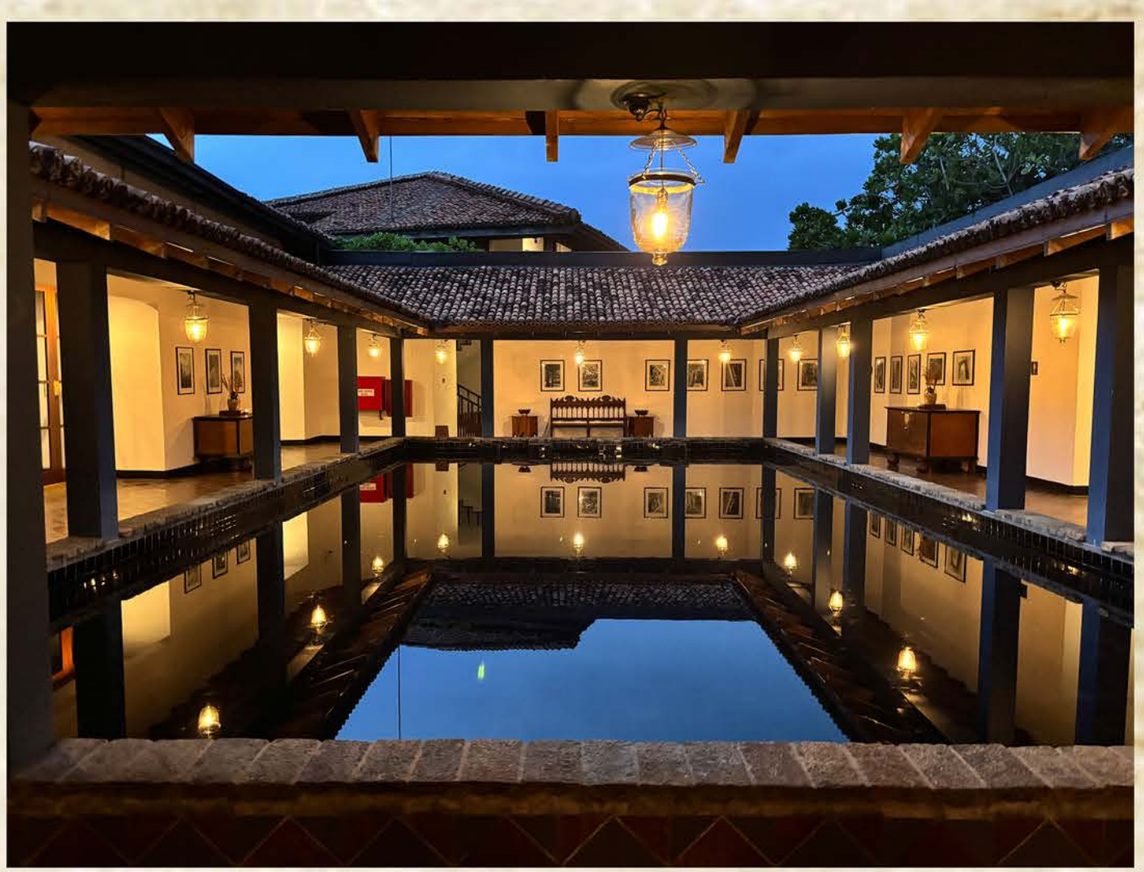
Steps pause, views align,

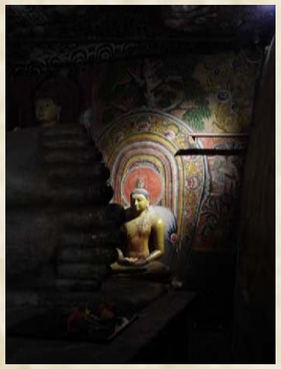
time slows without stopping.

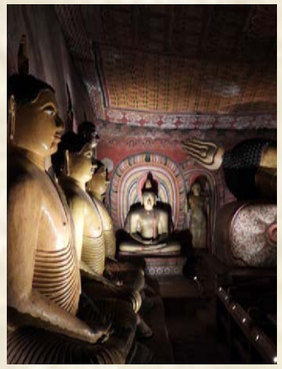
Here, nature learns a language,

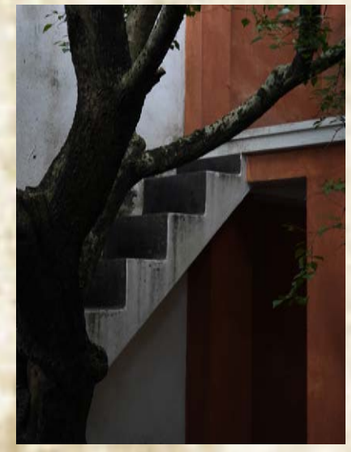
spoken softly, but fluently.

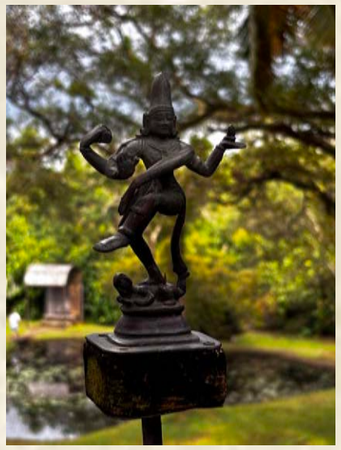
JETWING LIGHTHOUSE

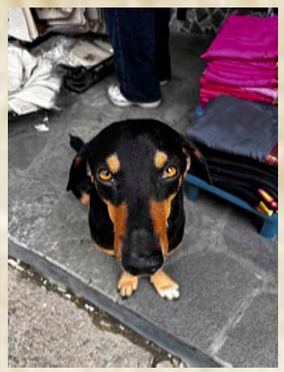
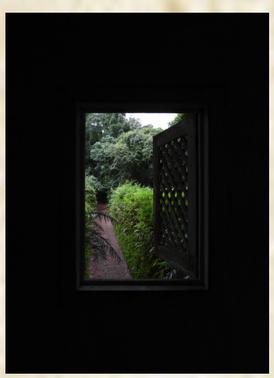


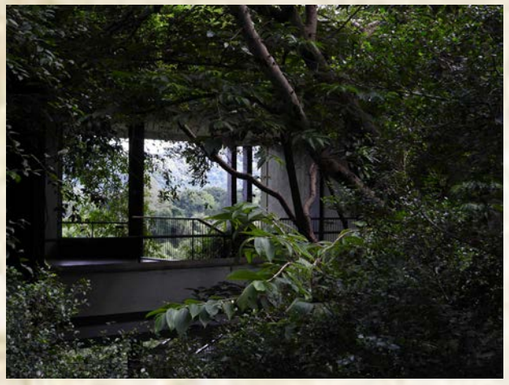


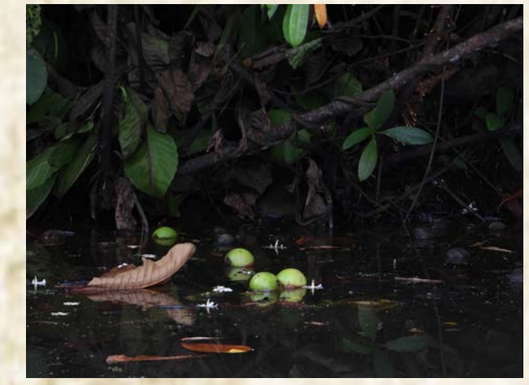










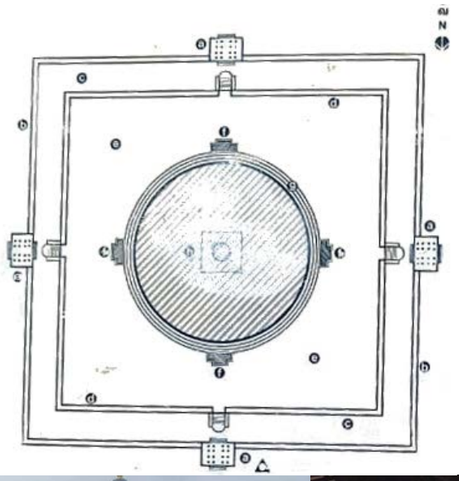
SRILANKAN IDENTITY: CULTURE AND MODERNISM

PREYASH MANANI | UAR23176

Sri Lankan identity is deeply rooted in Buddhism, introduced in the 3rd century BCE at Anuradhapura. Sacred cities like Polonnaruwa reflect Buddhist values through simple forms, monasteries, ponds, moonstones, and strong connections with nature, supporting meditation and daily life. Sites such as Sigiriya and Dambulla Cave Temple show advanced rock carving, painting, and sensitive integration with the landscape. This philosophy continues in modern architecture through Geoffrey Bawa, whose works reinterpret Buddhist calm using courtyards, water, natural light, and landscape, forming a continuous, nature-centered identity.

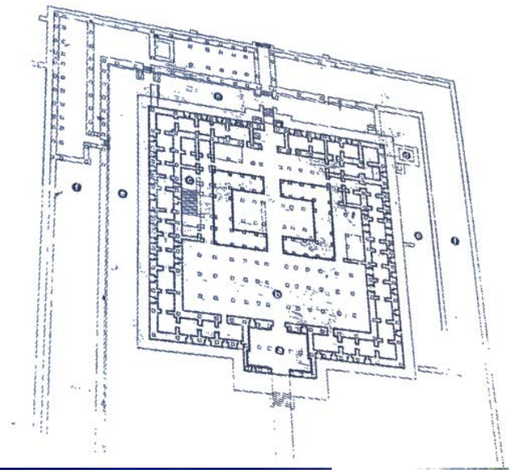
08c

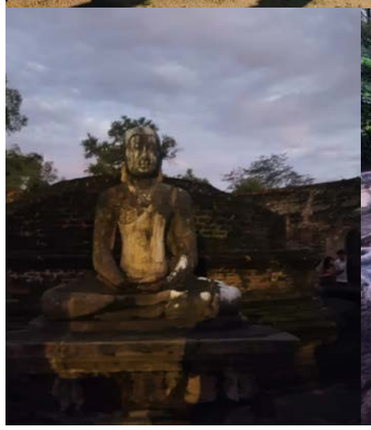
ANURADHAPURAM
FIRST ANCIENT CITY

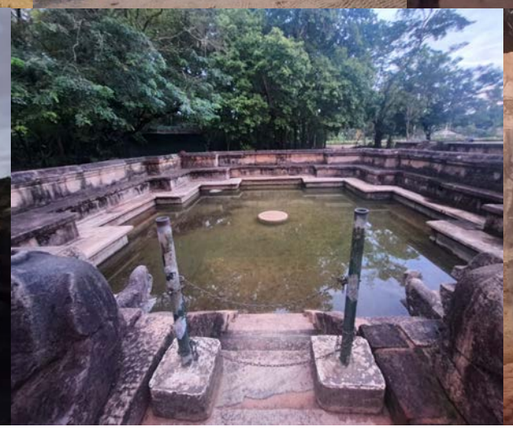


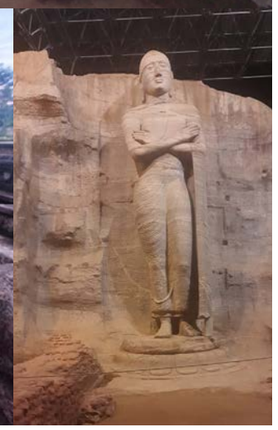
Anuradhapura represents a rich Buddhist civilization shaped by values of simplicity, calmness, and meditation. Its architecture supported spiritual life through open courtyards, tranquil ponds, monasteries, and stupas that blended with the natural landscape. Symbolic elements like the moonstone expressed Buddhist ideas of the life cycle and marked sacred and royal entrances. Locally sourced stone, brick, and timber were skillfully crafted—stone for durable stupas such as Ruwanwelisaya, brick for massive monastery walls and tanks, and wood for roofs, columns, and carvings. This peaceful, spiritually grounded city later faced repeated invasions, and prolonged conflict with south indian kings, eventually it led to its decline and abandonment and move towards new city polonnaruwa.

POLONNARUWA
SECOND ANCIENT CITY



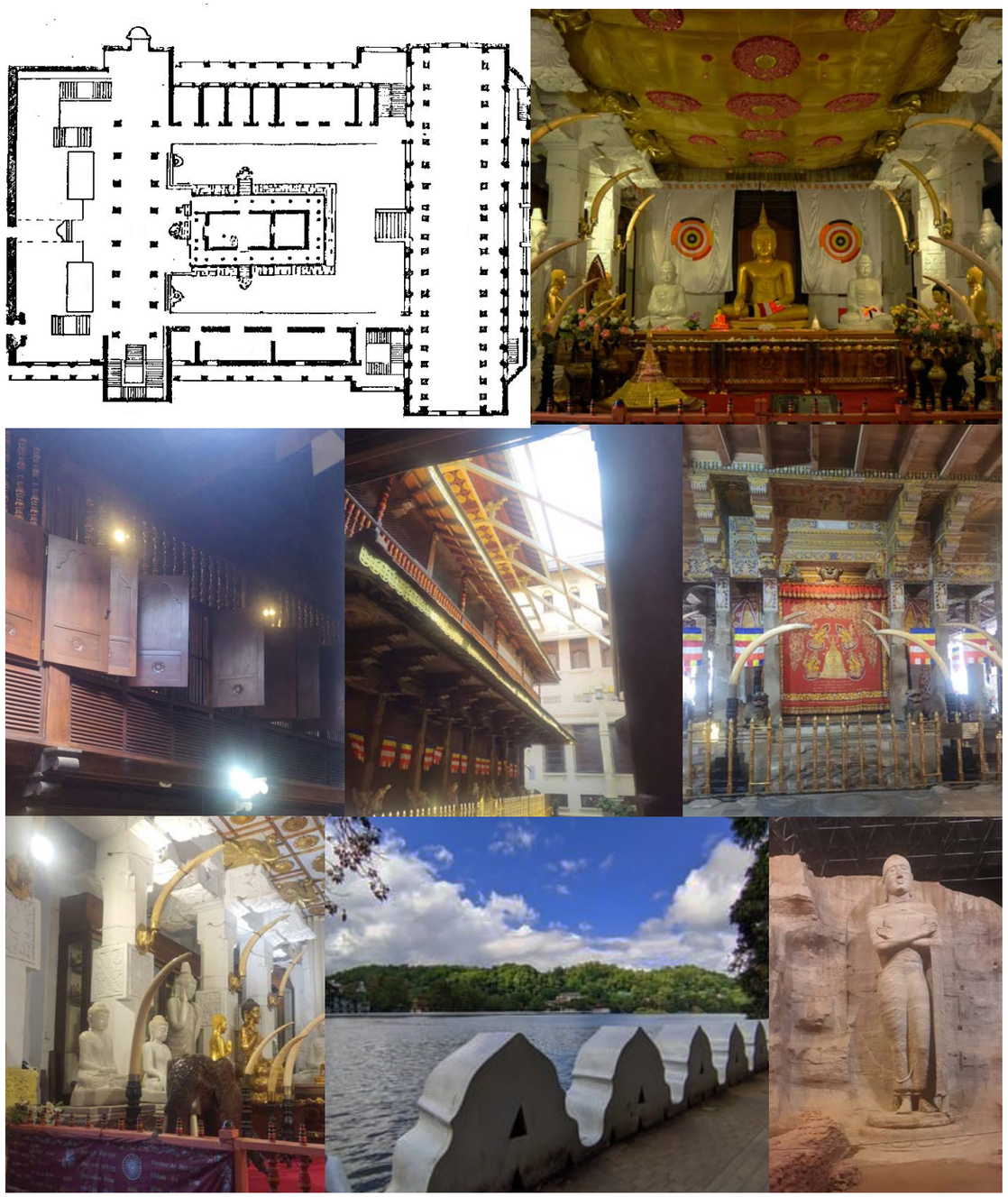






After defeat by South Indian kings, the king and people came here from Anuradhapura and established a new capital in Polonnaruwa. The architectural language continued with similar principles of Buddhist planning, emphasizing harmony with nature, calmness, and spiritual balance. Buildings were carefully placed within the landscape, using water bodies, open spaces, and axial layouts to support meditation and monastic life. Over time, Buddhist temples evolved with richer artistic and cultural expression, seen in detailed carvings, sculptures, and shrine houses. While maintaining spiritual simplicity, the architecture became more refined and symbolic, reflecting a mature phase of Buddhist culture rooted in landscape, ritual, and collective memory.

KANDY
Temple of Tooth

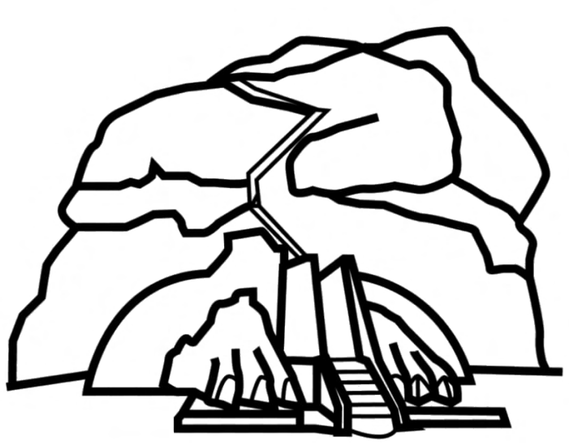


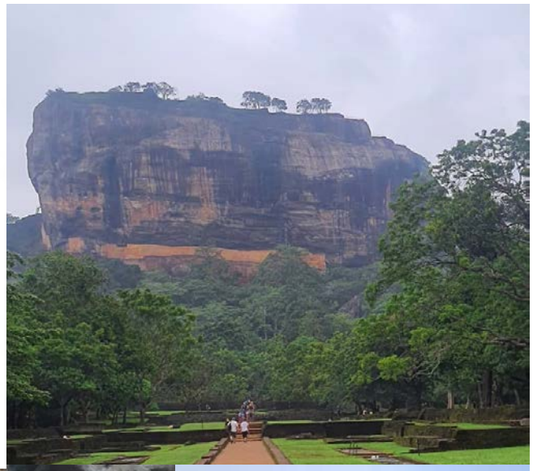
Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy is one of the most important Buddhist places in Sri Lanka. It keeps the sacred tooth relic of Buddha, which was believed to protect the country and give power to the king. The temple design shows strong Buddhist culture, with simple forms, wooden carvings, stone steps, and open courtyards used for rituals. The temple is placed near the lake and hills, creating a calm and spiritual feeling. Built during the Kandyan Kingdom, it has faced invasions and repairs, but it still remains a living center of worship, tradition, and Buddhist culture today.

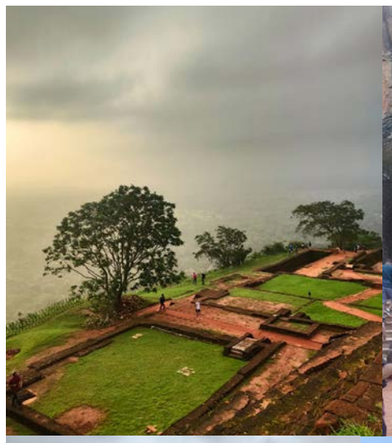
DAMBULLA
The Cave Temple

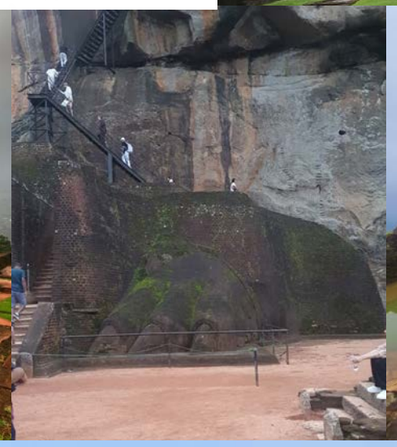
Dambulla Cave Temple strengthens Sri Lankan cultural identity through Buddhist art and architecture. Carved into a massive rock, the caves contain Buddha statues and wall paintings showing the Buddha's life and teachings. Natural rock forms were respected, creating calm, meditative spaces. These paintings and sculptures reflect deep devotion, storytelling, and royal support, making the temple a strong expression of Buddhism, culture, and spiritual continuity across Sri Lanka.

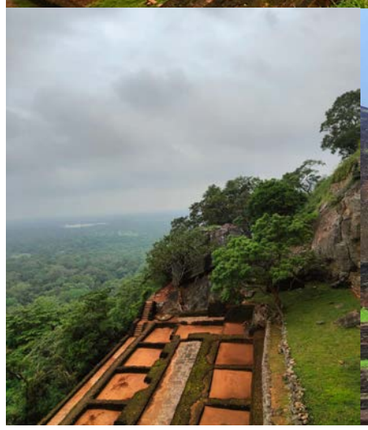
Sigiriya
Iconic Lion Rock





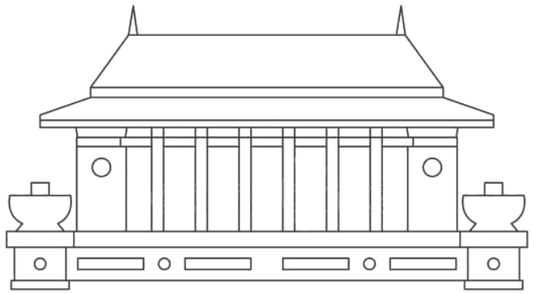


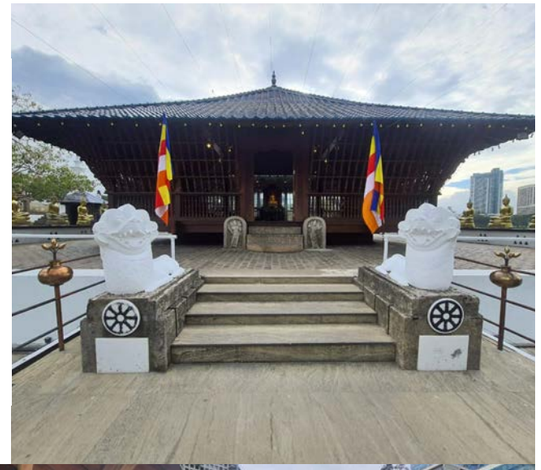


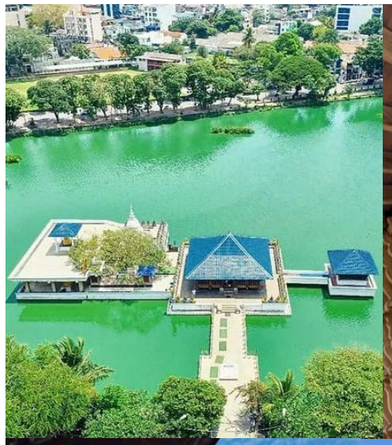


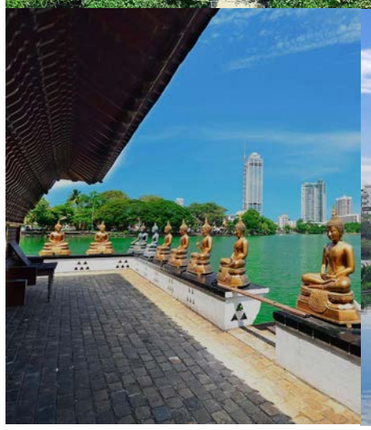
Sigiriya Lion Rock continues this cultural identity by using the natural rock form as the core of architecture, just like Dambulla. Rising from the landscape, the rock was shaped with terraces, water gardens, and pathways that blend nature with human design. The famous fresco paintings reflect refined artistic expression influenced by Buddhist thought and royal culture. The Lion Gate symbolized power and protection, while the overall planning created calm, balance, and respect for nature, making Sigiriya a strong example of how landscape, art, and spirituality together shaped Sri Lankan Buddhist identity

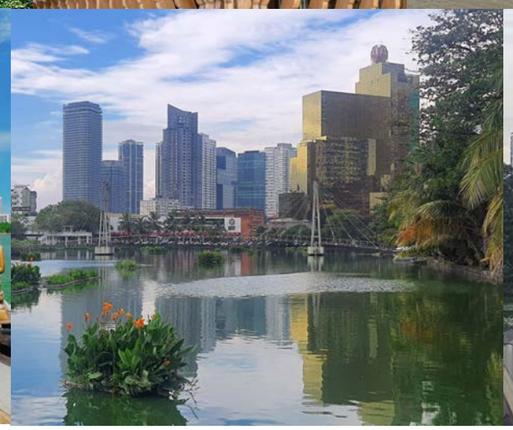
Seema malaka
Buddhist Spiritual Temple











Seema Malaka Temple reflects Sri Lankan Buddhist identity through simplicity and calmness. Built on a water body, the temple uses open platforms, timber elements, and minimal forms to create a peaceful space for meditation. The surrounding water represents purity and separation from the busy city, showing how Buddhist culture continues to shape sacred architecture while staying connected to nature and spiritual values.

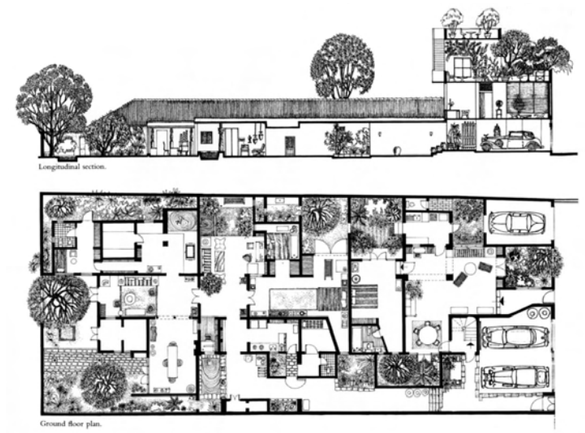
KANDALAMA
Contour Heritance Hotel

Heritance Kandalama expresses Sri Lankan culture through Buddhist values and tropical modernism by Geoffrey Bawa. The hotel is designed to merge with the natural rock, forest, and water, rather than standing separately from them. Calmness is experienced through long shaded corridors, slow movement spaces, framed views of nature, natural ventilation, and quiet water bodies that reduce noise and heat. These design choices encourage silence, reflection, and a relaxed pace of life, similar to Buddhist monastic environments. The building grows along the landscape, respecting nature and creating peace through spatial experience, making it a modern continuation of Sri Lankan cultural and spiritual identity.

GALLE
Jetwing lighthouse Hotel

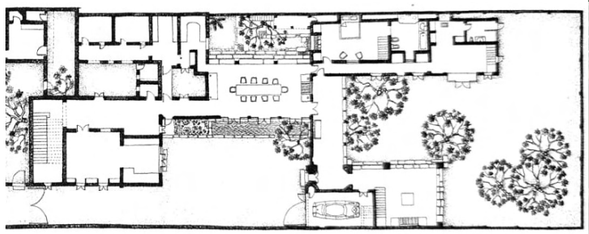
Responding to its coastal setting and historical context, Jetwing Lighthouse Hotel expresses Sri Lankan identity through tropical modernist architecture. The hotel is designed with strong connections to the ocean, landscape, and local history. Calmness is created through open corridors, sea-facing terraces, shaded verandas, and natural airflow that softens the tropical climate. The use of stone, timber, water features, and controlled light encourages slow movement and reflection. The architecture blends modern form with cultural meaning, creating a peaceful spatial experience rooted in Sri Lankan identity and climate.

HOUSE NO.11
Geoffrey Bawa`s House



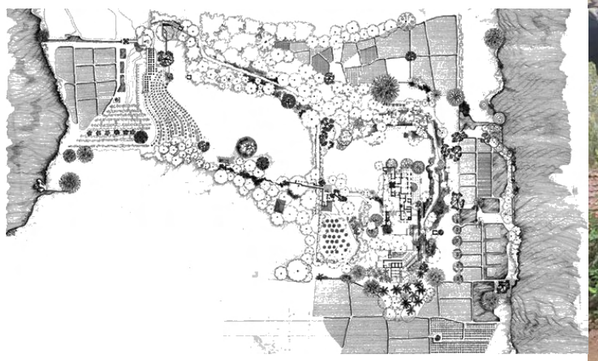
Through the walking experience, House No. 11 shows Sri Lankan identity in a simple and clear way. When you enter from the narrow street, you move slowly through shaded passages, small courtyards, and water bodies. Openings bring in light, air, and views of plants. Walls guide your movement and block outside noise. Changes in light, breeze, and floor level make the walk calm and thoughtful. This slow movement helps people feel connected to nature, daily life, and tropical modern living.

DE SARAM HOUSE
Geoffery Bawa`s Design



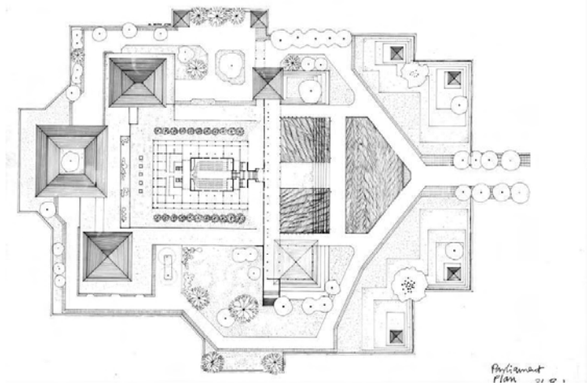
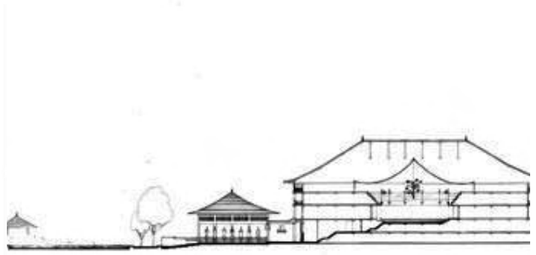
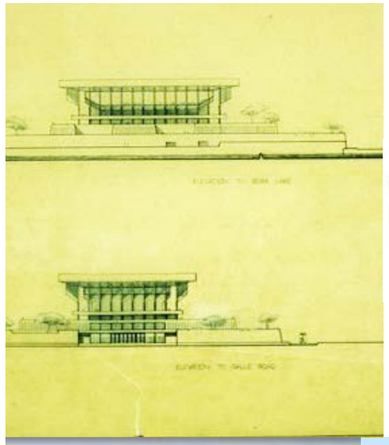
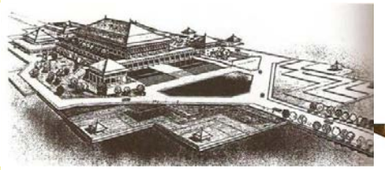
De Saram House expresses Sri Lankan identity through tropical modern living. Movement begins from shaded entrances and flows through open interiors connected by courtyards and water bodies. Large openings, screens, and verandas allow light, air, and garden views to guide each step. Water ponds cool the spaces and add gentle sound during movement. The walk feels open and continuous, where nature, simple materials, and climate shape daily life, reflecting Buddhist-influenced values through spatial experience rather than form.

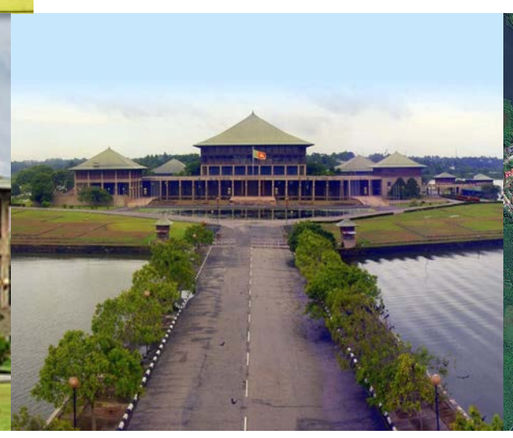
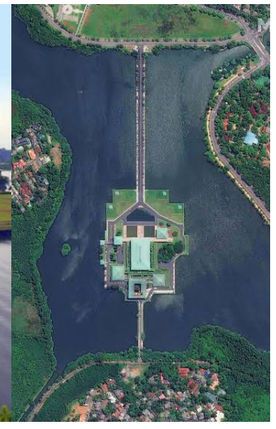
LUNUGANGA
Geoffrey Bawa`s Estate



Through carefully controlled landscape and built form, Lunuganga Estate presents a strong expression of Sri Lankan cultural identity within tropical modernism. The garden is planned as a sequence of spaces, where walking becomes a slow, intentional journey. Axial paths, framed vistas, terraces, and water bodies create clear visual order and discipline. Built pavilions are minimal and act as pauses within the landscape. Nature is shaped, not disturbed, allowing silence, balance, and reflection to emerge through movement. This deliberate relationship between land, architecture, and experience reflects Buddhist-influenced ideas of order, mindfulness, and harmony embedded in Sri Lankan landscape design.

PARLIAMENT
Sri Lankan Property

At a national scale, the Sri Lankan Parliament Complex reflects Sri Lankan identity through landscape and built form. The walking experience moves slowly across bridges and shaded paths surrounded by water, creating a sence of pause and focues. Low horizontal forms, deep roofs, and controlled opening guide movement inward,while water and landscape shape a clam, ordered environment that expresses dignity,balance, and collective cultural values.

CONCLUSION

Together, these examples show how Sri Lankan identity is shaped by Buddhist values, landscape, and lived experience. From ancient cities to modern buildings, space is designed through movenment, water, light, and nature. This continuity transforms spiritual principales into architecture and landscape, forming a unique tropical modern identity rooted in culture, meomery, and place.

09

ELEMENTS OF SRI LANKA: WATER, LANDSCAPE & MOVEMENT AS A CONTINUUM OF DOMESTICITY

Group 09
Avani, Joseph, Harish

Sri Lankan architecture is deeply shaped by water, vegetation, landscape, and movement, creating domesticity as an experiential condition rather than a formal enclosure. Historically, from the Polonnaruwa period, water systems, terrain, and ceremonial paths structured settlements through hierarchy and ritual. Over time, these elements transformed at smaller scales, becoming intimate devices that mediate climate and everyday life. In the modern period, the work of Geoffrey Bawa reinterprets these traditions through human-scaled paths, courtyards, water bodies, and gardens. Architecture unfolds through movement, where landscape and built form merge to produce a continuous, lived domestic experience across scales and periods.

Water creates Domesticity

Harish Murugan - PUP24118

Water has been central to Sri Lankan architecture, shaping domesticity across scales and periods. During the Polonnaruwa era, tanks and moats expressed collective life, power, and ritual, embedding everyday living within controlled landscapes. In modern architecture, water becomes intimate and experiential. In the work of Geoffrey Bawa, ponds and pools are woven into courtyards, verandahs, and circulation paths, cooling spaces and slowing movement. By framing views, reflecting light, and softening thresholds, water blurs inside–outside boundaries and encourages pause, interaction, and contemplation, creating domesticity as a lived, sensory experience rather than a purely enclosed condition.

09a

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Anuradhapura
(377 BCE – 1017 CE) - 1400 years

Sigeria

Kandy

Lunaganga Gardens

New Parliment

De saram House

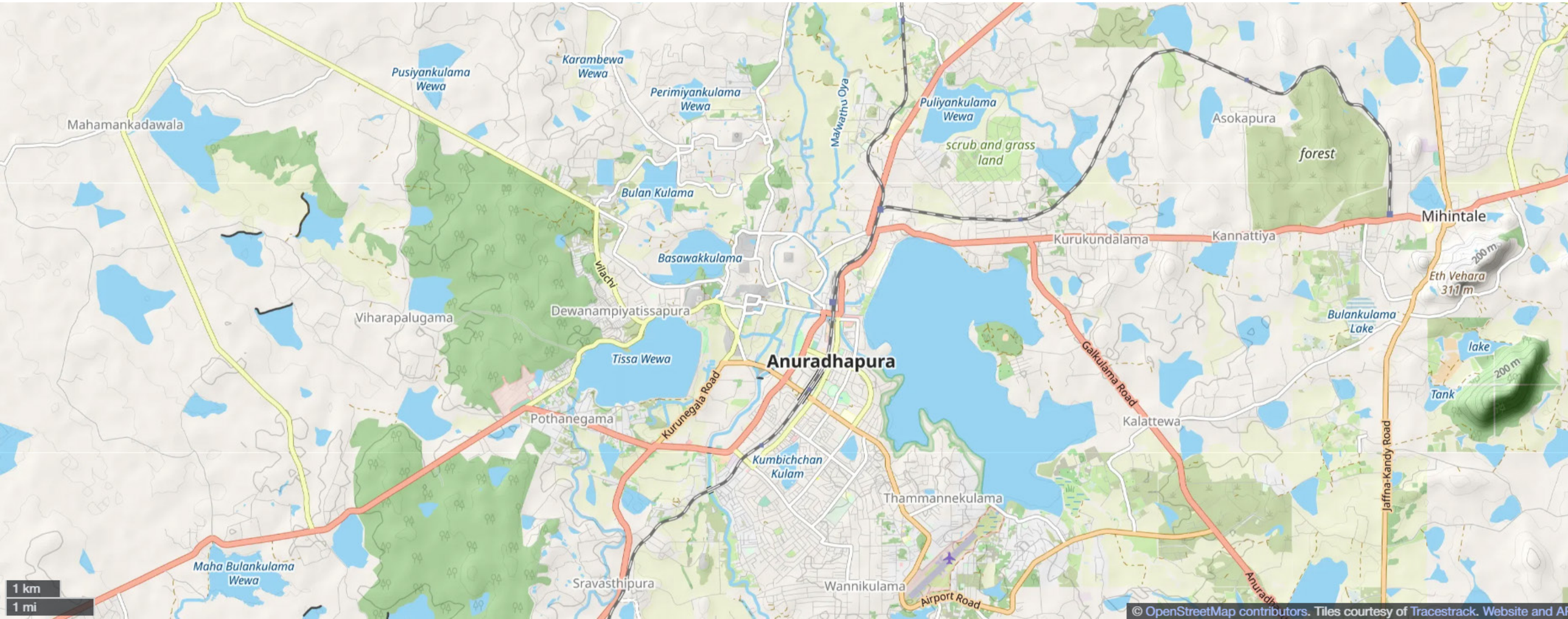
Polonnaruwa Period
1017 CE – 1236 CE

ANURADHAPURA
THE FIRST KINGDOM

In Anuradhapura, **water was not merely an infrastructural necessity but the primary organizing element of urban planning and domestic life.** The city's tank–cascade system structured settlement patterns, street networks, and land use, ensuring that everyday domestic activities bathing, washing, cooking, agriculture, and ritual Wwere closely integrated with water access. Residential areas, monasteries, and civic spaces were deliberately located in relation to tanks and canals, making water a constant presence in daily routines.

At the planning scale, **water created collective domesticity**, where the city functioned like an extended household dependent on shared resources. Tanks acted as social anchors, around which neighborhoods formed and community life unfolded. Streets and movement paths followed canals and embankments, producing shaded, walkable routes that reinforced everyday interactions. This proximity moderated climate, reduced heat stress, and supported comfortable living in a dry-zone environment.

By embedding **water into the spatial structure of the city**, Anuradhapura transformed infrastructure into lived landscape. Domesticity was thus created not only within individual dwellings but across the entire urban fabric, where planning, ecology, and everyday life were inseparable.



Monastic Complexes near Tanks

Monasteries such as **Jetavanaramaya** and Abhayagiri were deliberately located near tanks, allowing monks' daily routines bathing, washing, meditation to occur in close relationship with water, reinforcing domesticity even within institutional

Jethawanaramaya southern pond

Abhaya Wewa (Basawakkulama Tank)

One of the earliest tanks in Anuradhapura, Abhaya Wewa structured nearby residential and monastic settlements. It provided water for bathing, washing, irrigation, and daily rituals, embedding water into everyday domestic routines. At the planning level, neighborhoods grew around the tank, making water a social and climatic anchor rather than just infrastructure.

Tissa Wewa

Tissa Wewa functioned as both an irrigation source and an urban edge. Streets, monasteries, and dwellings were aligned with its embankments, creating shaded movement paths and cooled microclimates. The tank reinforced collective domesticity, where the city functioned as a shared household dependent on common water resources.

Nuwara Wewa

Located closer to civic and residential zones, Nuwara Wewa supported domestic life through water access for households and public institutions. Its scale balanced utility and proximity, demonstrating how planning integrated water bodies within walking distance of daily life.

Tank Cascade System

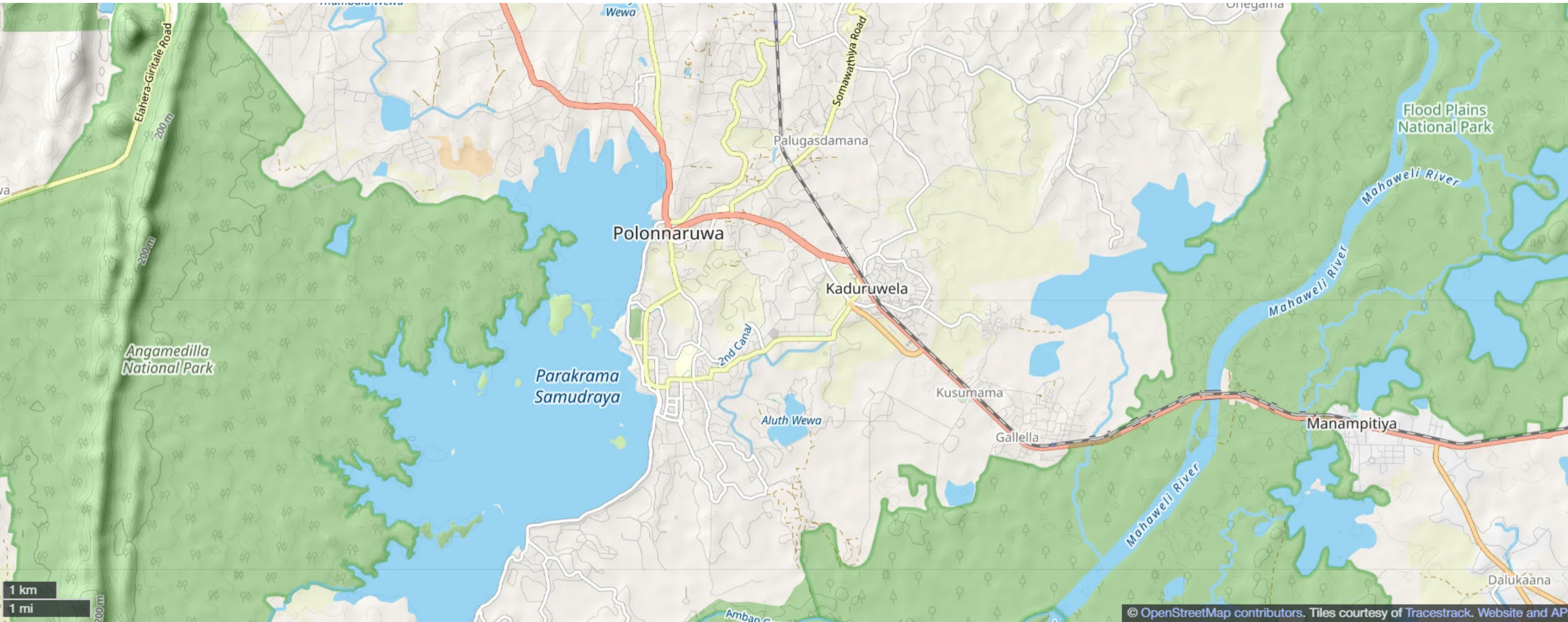
The cascade system connected multiple small and large tanks through canals, structuring settlement distribution and agricultural land use. This system created resilience and ensured continuity of domestic life during dry seasons, making water central to everyday survival and urban stability.

POLONARWA
THE SECOND KINGDOM

In Polonnaruwa, **water functioned as a dominant organizing element** of urban planning, though its role in domesticity was mediated through power, order, and monumentality. The city was structured around large reservoirs such as Parakrama Samudra, canals, and moats that supported agriculture, ritual, and urban life. Settlement patterns, royal precincts, monasteries, and civic spaces were deliberately aligned with these water systems, ensuring controlled and reliable access across the city.

At the planning scale, **water created a form of collective domesticity rooted in governance and centralized control.** Movement networks, ceremonial axes, and processional routes followed embankments and canals, reinforcing hierarchy while structuring everyday circulation. Water moderated the harsh dry-zone climate, supported bathing and ritual practices, and sustained agricultural productivity, enabling the functioning of daily life within a highly ordered urban framework.

Unlike the more dispersed and intimate domesticity of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa's planning embedded domestic life within monumental landscapes of water. By integrating vast reservoirs into the city's spatial logic, Polonnaruwa transformed water infrastructure into a civic and lived landscape where domestic routines, ritual practices, and urban order were collectively sustained through a carefully managed hydraulic system.



Kumara Pokuna

Parakrama samudraya
as Reservoiur

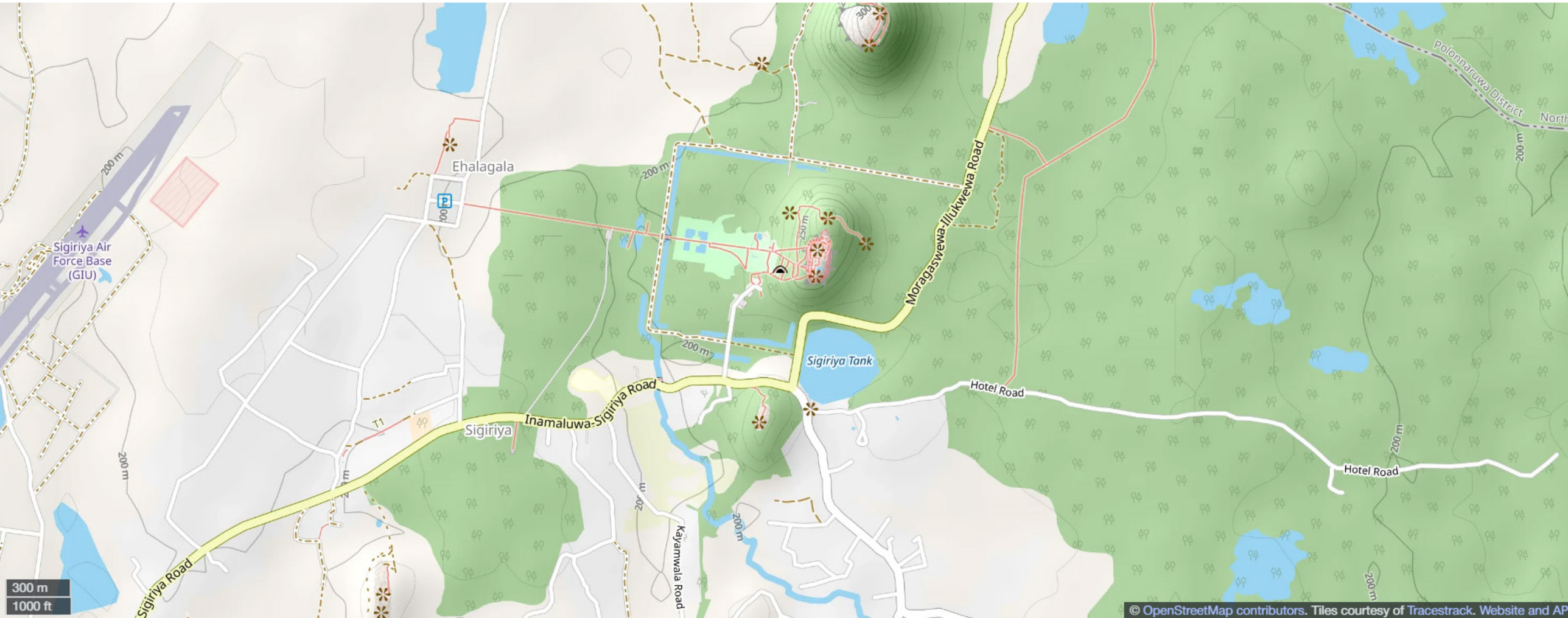
creating dominance in the built structure , but water bodies acting as gathering point for the public

SIGERIA

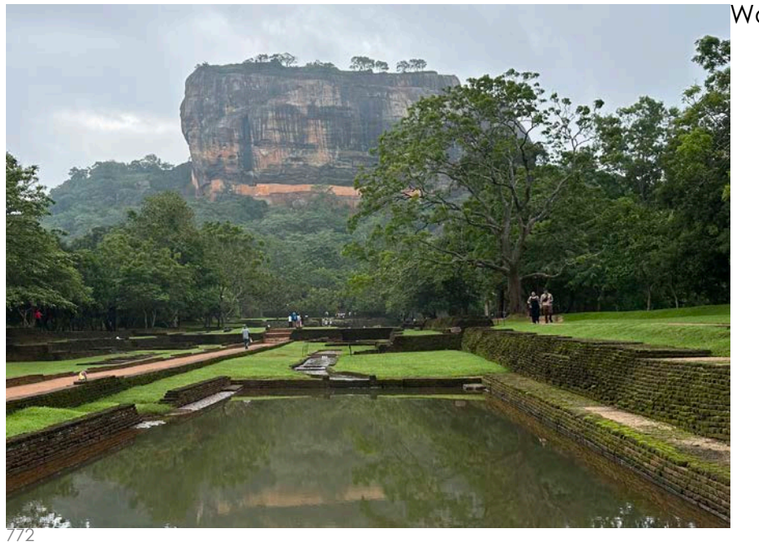
In Sigiriya, **water played a critical role in shaping planning, movement, and lived experience within a highly constrained and dramatic landscape.** The hydraulic system comprising moats, tanks, fountains, and water gardens was carefully integrated with topography, allowing water to structure circulation, climate moderation, and everyday life within the fortress complex. Unlike dispersed urban settlements, Sigiriya's planning embedded domestic routines within a fortified and ritualized landscape.

At the planning level, **water created a layered domesticity through movement. Moats and water gardens defined thresholds between public, royal, and private zones, guiding daily and ceremonial circulation.** Fountains and pools cooled spaces, softened the harsh climate, and introduced sensory comfort within an otherwise monumental setting. Water was encountered continuously along paths, transforming movement itself into a lived, domestic experience.

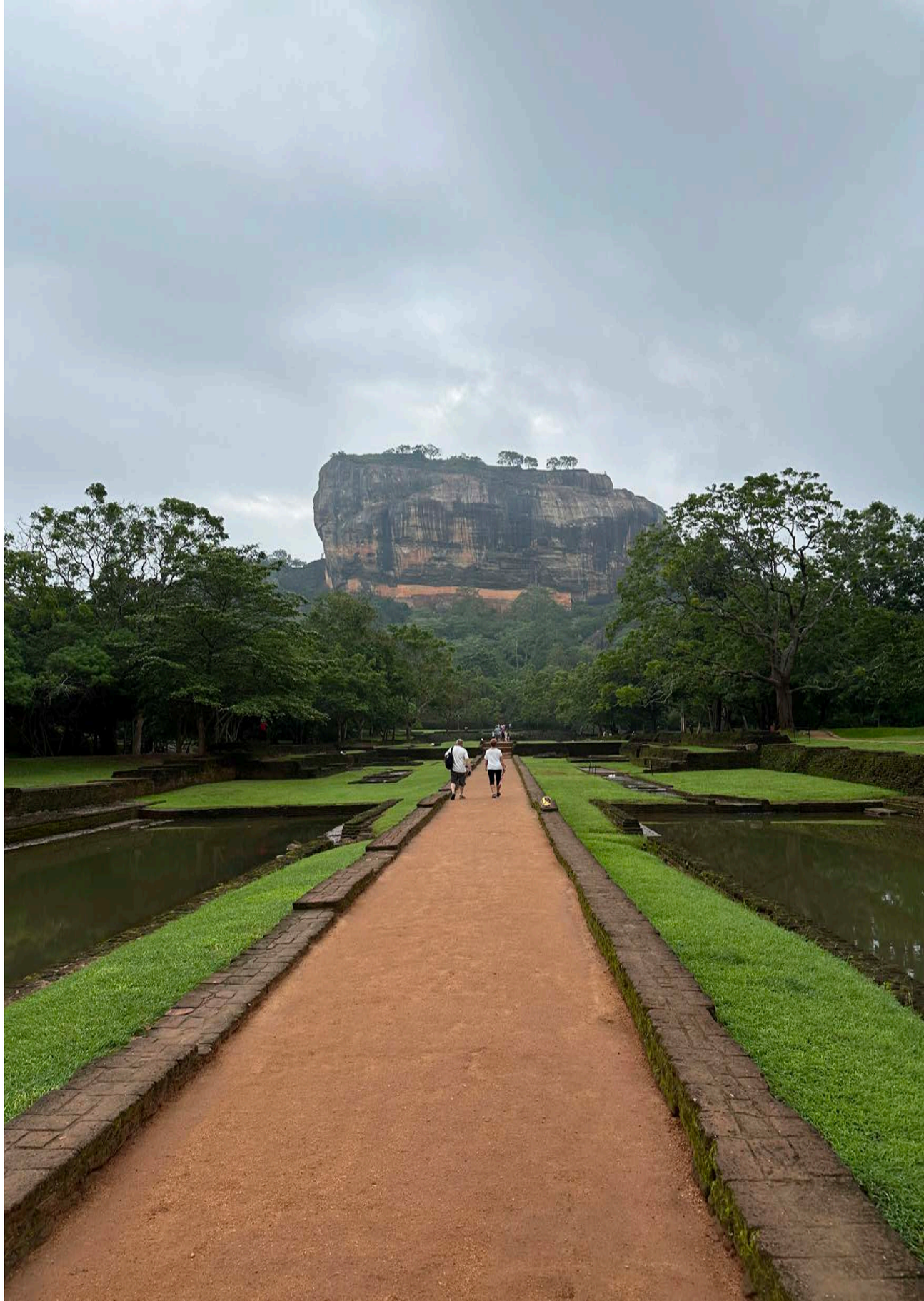
By weaving water into gardens, terraces, and circulation routes, Sigiriya transformed a defensive citadel into a habitable landscape. Domesticity here was not expressed through scale or enclosure but through proximity to water, shade, and sensory relief demonstrating how even an imperial landscape could support everyday life through careful environmental planning.



Rock cut pool



Water fountain

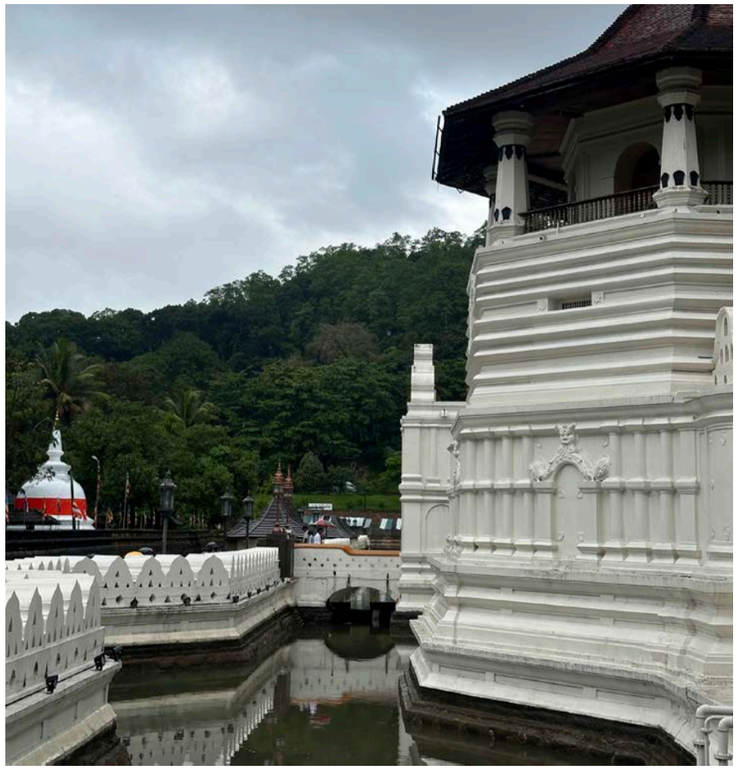


KANDY PALACE

In the Kandy Palace, **water played a subtle yet critical role in shaping planning, movement, and everyday life within a dense urban and ceremonial context.** Located beside Kandy Lake, the palace complex was planned in close relationship with the water body, using it as a climatic moderator, visual anchor, and symbolic edge rather than a monumental reservoir.

At the planning level, **water supported domesticity by softening royal architecture through proximity and scale**. The lake created a calm microclimate, reduced heat, and framed views from palace buildings, making daily living spaces more comfortable and humane. Movement within and around the palace was choreographed along shaded edges and terraces facing the lake, allowing water to be continuously experienced during everyday routines.

Unlike the monumental hydraulic landscapes of Anuradhapura or Polonnaruwa, **water in Kandy operated at a more urban and domestic scale.** The palace complex functioned as part of the living city, where water was woven into everyday court life, ritual, and movement. By integrating water into a compact urban setting, the Kandy Palace demonstrates how water can create domesticity through intimacy, climate moderation, and experiential continuity rather than through scale or dominance.



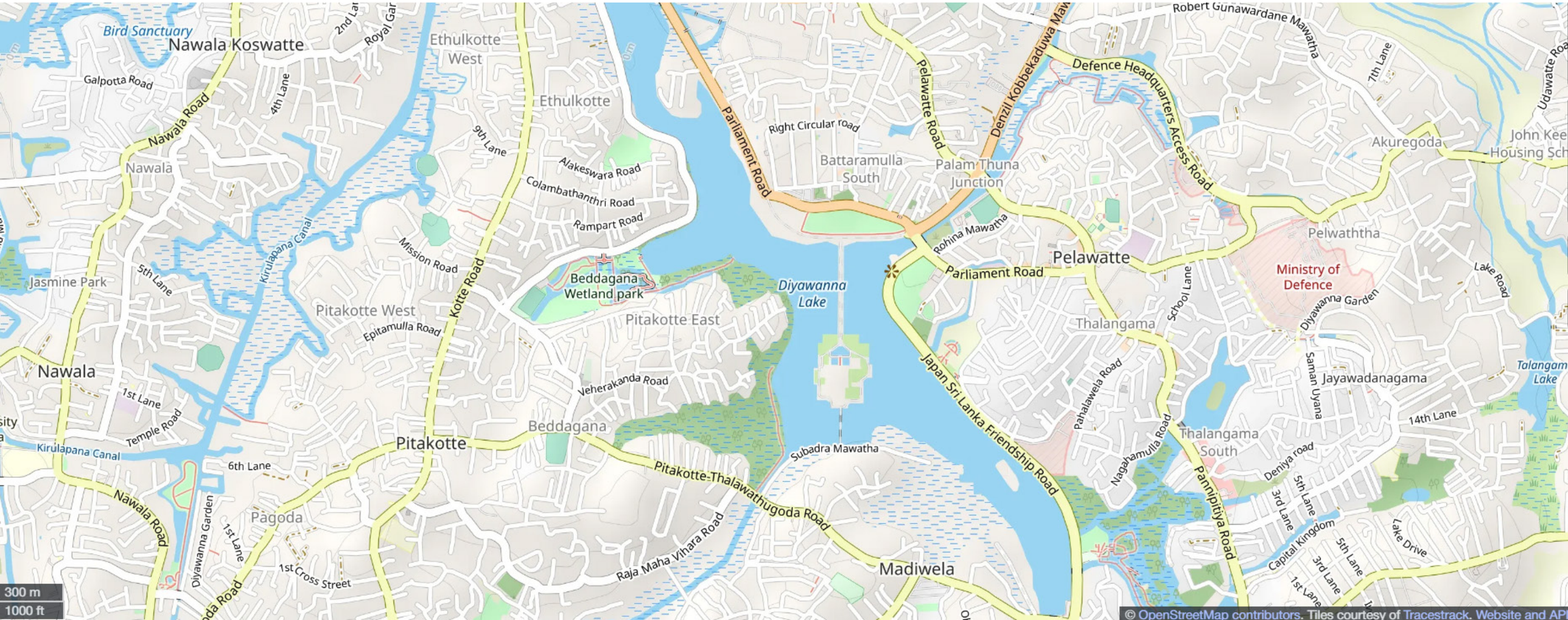
Water act as a Barrier

NEW PARLIMENT

In the Sri Lankan Parliament Complex, designed by Geoffrey Bawa, **water functions as a deliberate instrument of separation and authority rather than domesticity.** Set within the Diyawanna Oya, the Parliament is physically detached from the surrounding city, using water as a buffer that establishes distance between the public realm and the seat of governance.

At the planning level, **water reinforces hierarchy and control**. Access is restricted through bridges and formal approaches, transforming everyday movement into a controlled, ceremonial sequence. The surrounding water body acts as a symbolic moat, elevating the institution as a higher power while limiting casual public engagement. Unlike domestic environments where water encourages interaction and comfort, here it creates psychological and physical detachment.

While water continues to moderate climate and soften the building's edges, its dominant role is to separate the governed from the governing. The landscape, though serene, reinforces authority rather than intimacy. In this sense, the Parliament reinterprets historical royal precedents where water framed power and exclusivity within a modern democratic context. Domesticity is deliberately withheld, replaced by controlled access, visual dominance, and institutional gravitas.



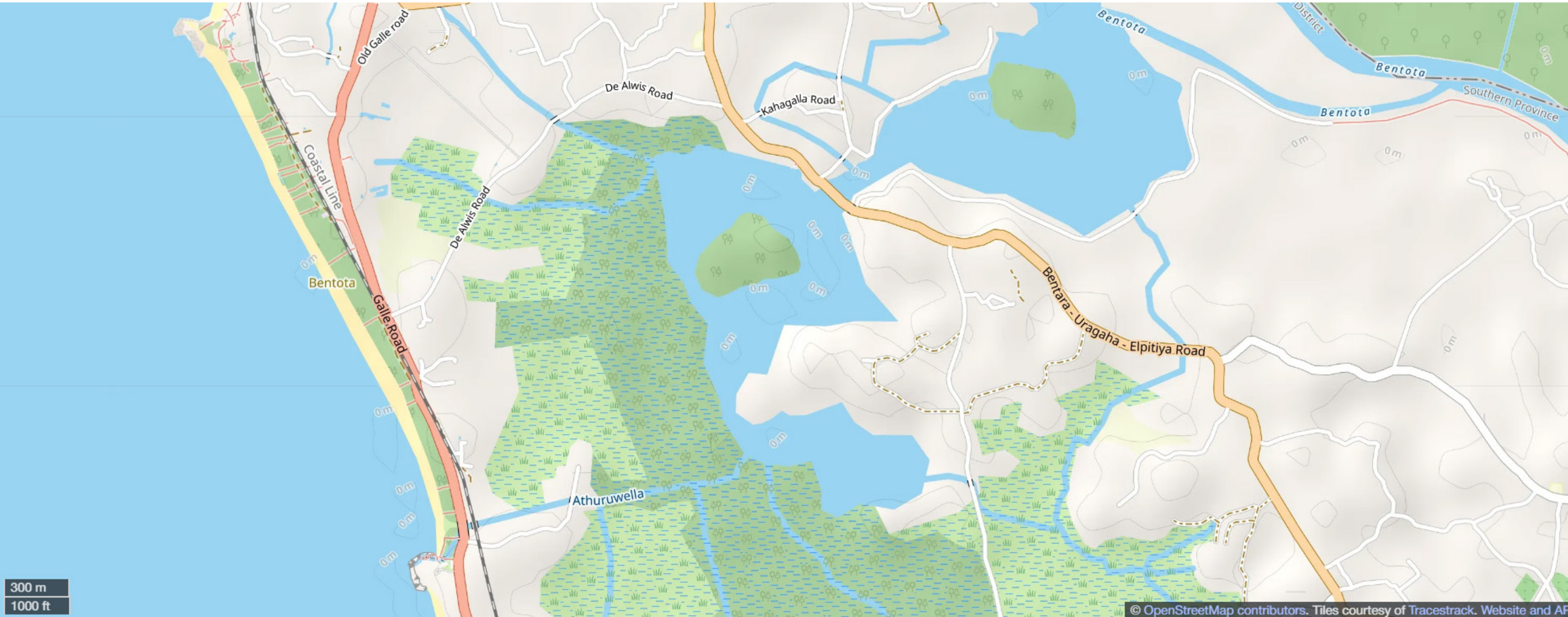
Water in Shaping Power and Separation

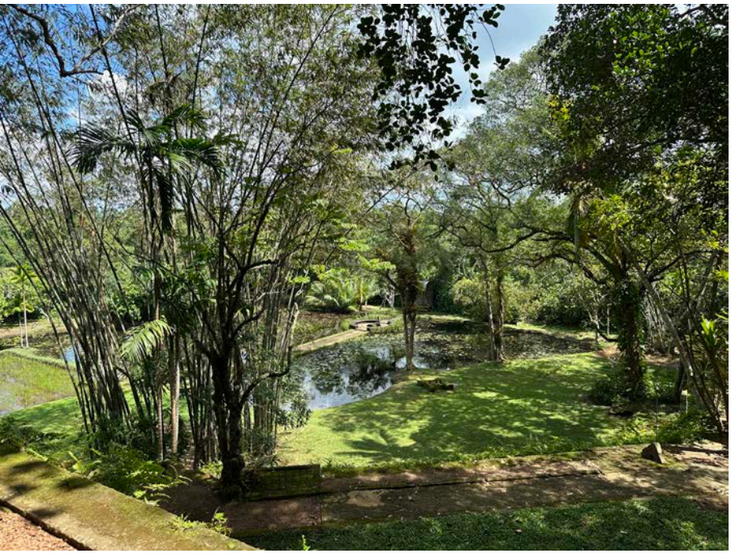
LUNAGANGA GARDENS

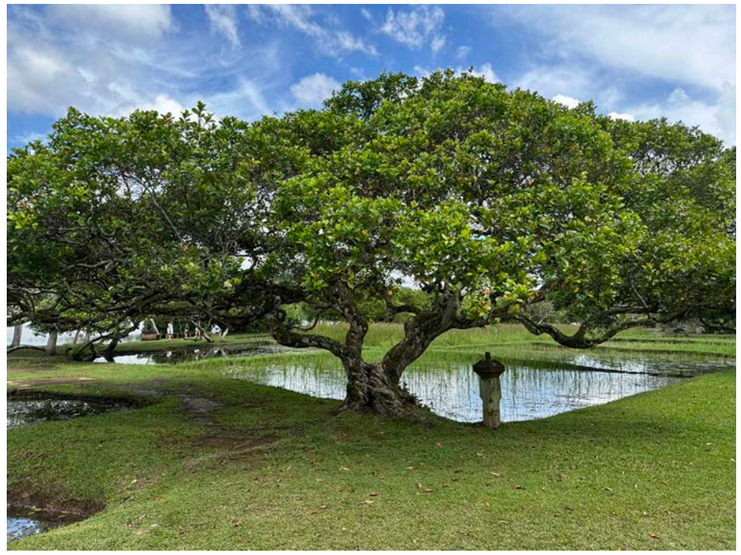
In Lunuganga Estate, the personal estate of Geoffrey Bawa, water is central to shaping planning, movement, and everyday living. Situated between a lagoon and inland water bodies, **Lunuganga is conceived as a carefully choreographed landscape where water frames views**, defines edges, and anchors spatial sequences rather than acting as a barrier.

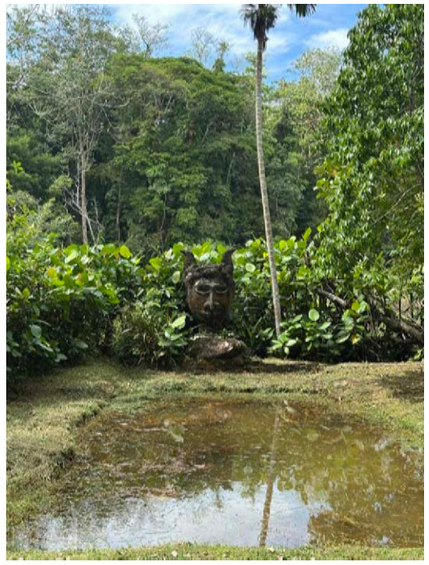
At the planning level, **water creates deep domesticity through movement and pause.** Paths are aligned to reveal and conceal water gradually, encouraging slow walking, reflection, and informal occupation. Ponds, terraces, and framed vistas establish moments of stillness, allowing water to become part of daily routines rather than a distant backdrop. Unlike monumental or institutional settings, water here invites proximity and familiarity.

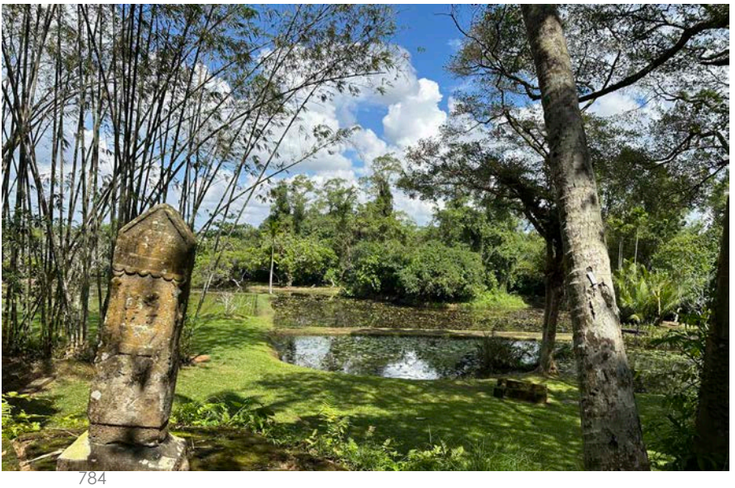
Water also softens boundaries between garden and house, making domestic life extend into the landscape. Climatically, it cools spaces and enhances comfort, while experientially it slows time and movement. At Lunuganga, water transforms landscape into lived space, demonstrating how domesticity can be created not through enclosure but through continuous engagement with nature, memory, and everyday rituals.







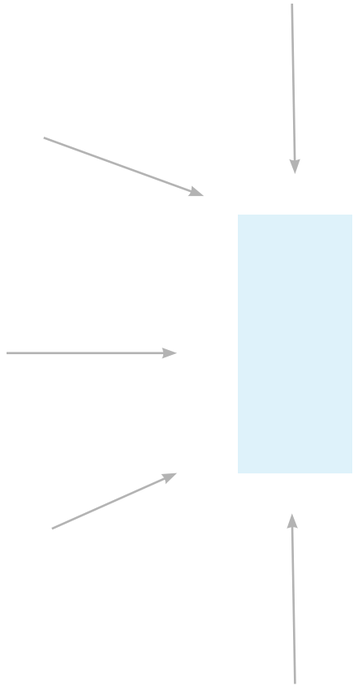




Pause Points

DE SARAM

FOCAL POINT



09b

Landscape as Spatial Infrastructure of Domesticity

Joseph J Zacharia | PUP24154

In Sri Lanka, domesticity has historically been shaped less by buildings and more by **open space**. Landscape, comprising terrain, vegetation, shade, and ground, functions as the primary spatial medium through which comfort, sociability, ritual, and everyday life are experienced. From the dispersed **monastic landscapes** of Anuradhapura to the **structured terraces** of Polonnaruwa and the climatic adaptations of the **colonial bungalow**, domestic living has always unfolded at the **threshold between built and unbuilt**. Geoffrey Bawa reinterprets this tradition through tropical modernism, allowing landscape to author movement, pause, and sensory experience in projects such as No. 11, Lunuganga, and the Kandalama Hotel. Across time, landscape in Sri Lanka enables **living to occur within nature**, making the ground itself a continuum of domestic life.

Anuradhapura
Domesticity in the ancient periods. Landscape as a mediator to emphasise the monastic structures

1

Early Civilisation era

0

Introduction
Sri Lankan Architecture

Polonnaruwa
Domesticity is spread out in the surrounding landscape. The buildings are a separate entity from the landscape

2

Tropical Modernism

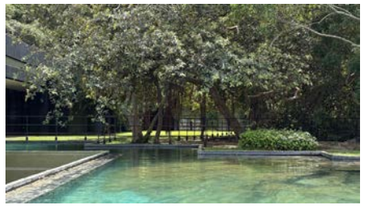
3

House No. 11
Where Domesticity is enacted in the voids

Lunuganga Estate
Where the landscape itself becomes the architecture of daily living.

5

Kandalama Hotel
When landscape itself makes way for the form that cultivates domesticity



6

Stanley de Saram House
Where Domesticity is choreographed considering privacy and micro-climate within a suburban setting.

4

7

Sri Lankan Parliament
Where political power shapes the landscape that dissolves domesticity

Comparative Analysis Matrix

Sri Lankan Architecture

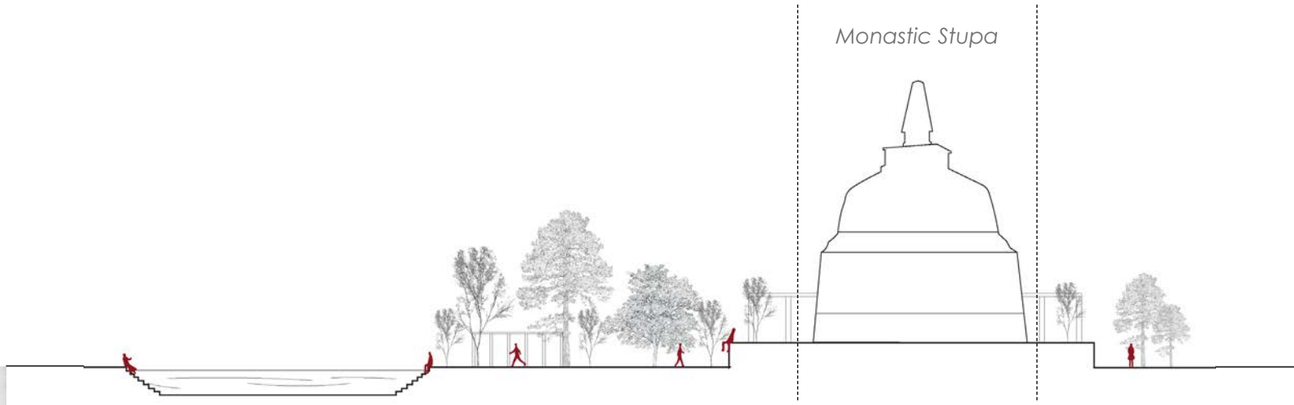
Sri Lanka's architectural identity is a masterful dialogue between human shelter and a vibrant, tropical environment defined by intense heat and dense, emerald vegetation. To coexist with the island's thick jungles, buildings are often designed as porous structures that embrace rather than exclude the landscape; wide verandas and central courtyards (the Meda Midula) serve as "green lungs," allowing native flora to penetrate the heart of the home. This integration provides natural cooling through evapotranspiration, while the use of steeply pitched roofs with deep overhangs protects the interior from monsoon rains and the harsh equatorial sun. This philosophy reached its peak with Tropical Modernism, where architects like Geoffrey Bawa utilized "borrowed scenery" and living walls to make structures appear as if they were reclaimed by the forest. By blending local materials like timber and stone with the surrounding canopy, Sri Lankan architecture creates a seamless transition where the built environment feels like a natural extension of the wild, shaded landscape.

1. Anuradhapura

Anuradhapura is a major city in Sri Lanka, famous as the first capital of Sri Lanka for over a millennium, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and a crucial Buddhist pilgrimage center, featuring well-preserved ruins of palaces, monasteries, and massive stupas like Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi and Abhayagiri.

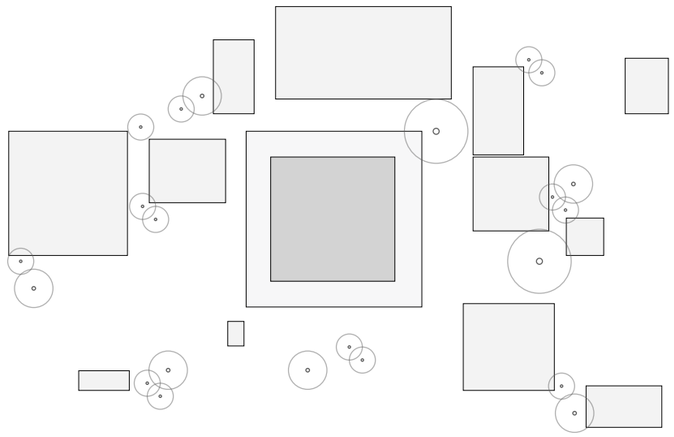
In Anuradhapura, landscape is the city. Monastic structures, stupas, and water bodies are dispersed across open terrain, turning the ground itself into a habitable framework. **Pause, conversation, bathing, worship, and rest** occur not inside buildings but under trees, beside tanks, or along pathways. Domesticity emerges from proximity to earth, shade, breeze, and water, where movement across the landscape shapes the rhythm of life.

Flat landscape on which terraces, plinths and structures are built



Section showing how people use the landscape around the monastic structures in Anuradhapura. Also highlighting how the structure sits as the dominent element in the context.

- Building as the main character
- The surrounding landscape sits cut off from the building but still used for various purposes like bathing, drinking and leisure.
- The building and the landscape is used to show power.

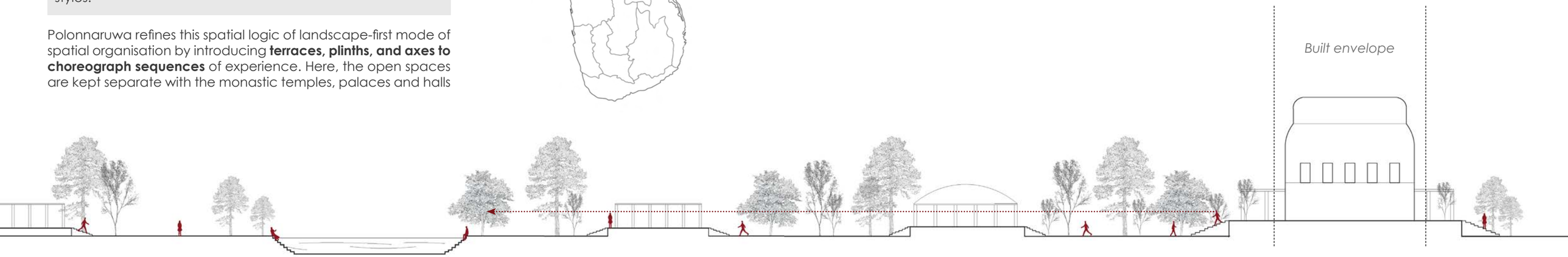


2. Polonnaruwa

Polonnaruwa is a UNESCO World Heritage site, the well-preserved ruins of Sri Lanka's second ancient capital (after Anuradhapura), famous for its 12th-century garden-city built by King Parakramabahu I, showcasing impressive palaces, stupas, and giant Buddha statues carved from rock like the Gal Vihara, reflecting both Chola and Sinhalese architectural styles.

Polonnaruwa refines this spatial logic of landscape-first mode of spatial organisation by introducing **terraces, plinths, and axes to choreograph sequences** of experience. Here, the open spaces are kept separate with the monastic temples, palaces and halls

Flat landscape on which terraces, plinths and structures are built



Ground as the primary living surface

Open, flat terrain functions as a shared domestic plane where daily activities, rituals, and social interactions unfold under open sky.

Visual connectivity across long distances

Clear sightlines through vegetation and across courtyards strengthen awareness of community and collective belonging.

Shaded edges as informal gathering zones

Tree canopies act as outdoor rooms, offering climatic comfort and encouraging social pause.

Soft natural boundaries

Tree lines and vegetation define enclosure while remaining open and permeable, ensuring a continuous relationship with the larger landscape.

Even during the colonial period, while new social hierarchies and construction technologies appeared, Sri Lankan domestic preferences continued to situate ***"life at the edge between built and unbuilt."*** Verandahs, gardens, and courtyards mediated climate, enabling everyday living to stay anchored in shade, soil, and breeze. **Landscape remained the essential facilitator of comfort and sociability.**

Tropical Modernism

Tropical Modernism in Sri Lanka represents a refined synthesis of modern architectural principles with the climatic, cultural, and landscape-specific realities of the island. Emerging prominently through the work of Geoffrey Bawa, it challenges the object-centric focus of modernism by dissolving boundaries between interior and exterior, enabling buildings to breathe, shade, and coexist with their surroundings. Open-to-sky spaces, verandahs, vegetation, and courtyards are integrated as essential architectural elements that generate comfort and domesticity in the tropics. Rather than importing global aesthetics, Tropical Modernism evolves from the spirit of place—prioritising human scale, material honesty, and landscape-led spatial experience—ultimately forming a distinct architectural identity rooted in Sri Lankan everyday life.

The Transition brought in by Bawa

Geoffrey Bawa inherits and elevates the legacy of landscape-led spatial culture, transforming it into a conscious architectural ideology that defines Sri Lanka's Tropical Modernism. For Bawa, landscape is not a backdrop but the primary author of spatial experience, it dictates how one moves, rests, perceives comfort, and senses belonging.

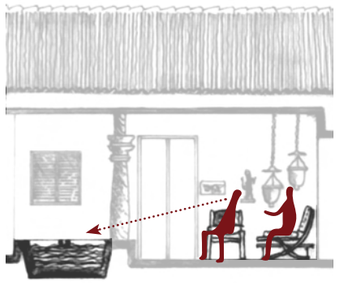
His architecture choreographs sequences of openness, shade, and framed nature, allowing domesticity to unfold through climate-responsive environments rather than built enclosure.

Courtyards, gardens, and terraces are not ornamental additions; they are structural elements that organise circulation and pause, ensuring that every architectural moment remains grounded in intimacy with terrain, breeze, light, and vegetation.

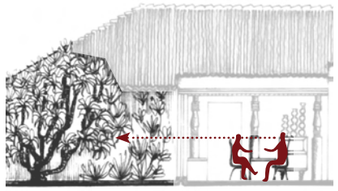
3. House No. 11

At House No. 11, which is his residence, Bawa inserts a sequence of small planted courtyards within a tight city block in Colombo, bringing sky, breeze, and vegetation into the heart of the home. Domesticity is enacted in the void, through framed glimpses of green and open-air thresholds that dissolve interior boundaries.

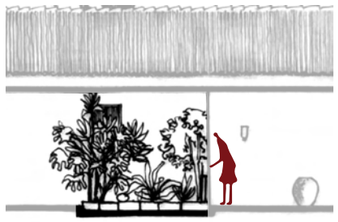
Landscape as pause points and converstion spots



Conversation point in front of a waterbody inside the house



Conversation and resting spot with the view of a semi-open garden space



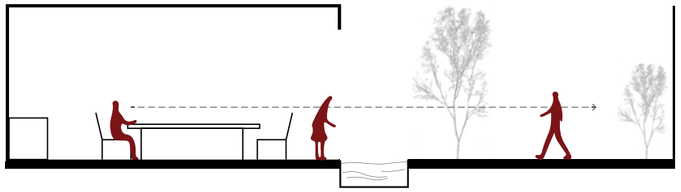
Pause point along the hallway with a small open-to-sky courtyard

Sitting and conversation spot facing a beautiful interior garden space

4. Stanley de Saram House

At the De Saram House, Geoffrey Bawa continues to refine domesticity through **choreographed landscape relationships**, but with a distinct emphasis on **privacy and micro-climate** within a suburban setting. The house is organized around a sequence of **compact courtyards and planted pockets** that introduce light, air, and greenery deep into the living spaces. These open voids create spatial breathing points, ***moments where life spills outdoors without leaving the comfort of home.***

Through careful positioning of trees, boundary walls, and ground levels, Bawa achieves enclosure without isolation: a domestic sanctuary where the land remains a constant companion. In De Saram House, domesticity is not a product of architectural form but of how architecture opens itself to sky, breeze, and vegetation, demonstrating that even in dense residential contexts, the landscape can remain the true heart of home.



The dining room opens directly onto the front yard, where creepers soften the boundary wall and a narrow linear pond with goldfish animates the space.

The backyard opens into a vast open space which is integrated with the common seating area in the back

Even small courtyards are placed with utmost detail so that it would provide visual experience, cooling and shading for every space within the built environment.

5. The Lunuganga Estate

At Lunuganga Estate, landscape itself becomes the architecture of daily living. Geoffrey Bawa transforms the ground into **a sequence of crafted environments** where terraces, lawns, groves, and framed vistas **behave much like interior rooms,** yet remain entirely open to sky, breeze, and shifting light. Movement through the estate is slow and exploratory, guided by **subtle level changes, shaded pathways, and carefully positioned views** that reveal one space at a time.

The spatial logic of Lunuganga is one of **choreographed openness.** Outdoor rooms are defined not by built edges but by hedges, tree canopies, and the curvature of the terrain.

Climate becomes a co-designer, trees filter sunlight into dappled textures, water surfaces cool the air, and breezes are channeled across terraces thereby cultivating a **multisensory domesticity.**

Stairs and pathways serve as **gentle transitions** between levels, fostering a rhythm of **pause and progression.**

Moments of Pause

Terraced lawns and sculpted water edges create outdoor rooms that choreograph movement and **frame moments** of pause along the landscape.

Point to rest

Mature trees act as natural canopies, offering shade, enclosure, and **a sense of domestic comfort within the open garden.**

More connected to the nature

The natural inhabitants finds the estate as a whole itself as a home that provides **shade, cool ground and natural grass** to feed on anytime it wants

Galleries
Low built edges and shaded verandahs blur the boundary between interior display and exterior landscape, enabling everyday life to extend seamlessly into the garden.

Terrace Wing
Stepped terraces produce outdoor rooms defined by topographic change, spaces for gathering and viewing that maintain comfort and human scale within a large estate.

Stepped pathways
The stepped pathways weave through changing ground levels, guiding movement gently downwards while framing pauses along the journey.

Guest Wing and Pavilion
Larger pavilion sits lightly among the trees, offering secluded moments of retreat while remaining visually and climatically connected to the land.

By cascading built elements along the natural slope, Lunuganga creates a spatial choreography where architecture supports the land's hierarchy. Domesticity unfolds through a gradual ascent from garden to pavilion, guided by shade, trees, and shifting ground.

6. When landscape itself makes way for the form

At **Kandalama Hotel,** Geoffrey Bawa manipulates scale to create a unique form of collective domesticity within a large architectural intervention. **Although the building extends across a significant length of the hillside, it never overwhelms the human experience.** Instead, the architecture is **broken into fragments that step along the terrain,** allowing nature to visually and physically dominate. Long open-air corridors replace interior hallways, transforming circulation into a landscape promenade where one feels as though they are **walking through a forest rather than a hotel.**

How the building blends into the landscape to cultivate domesticity at various points

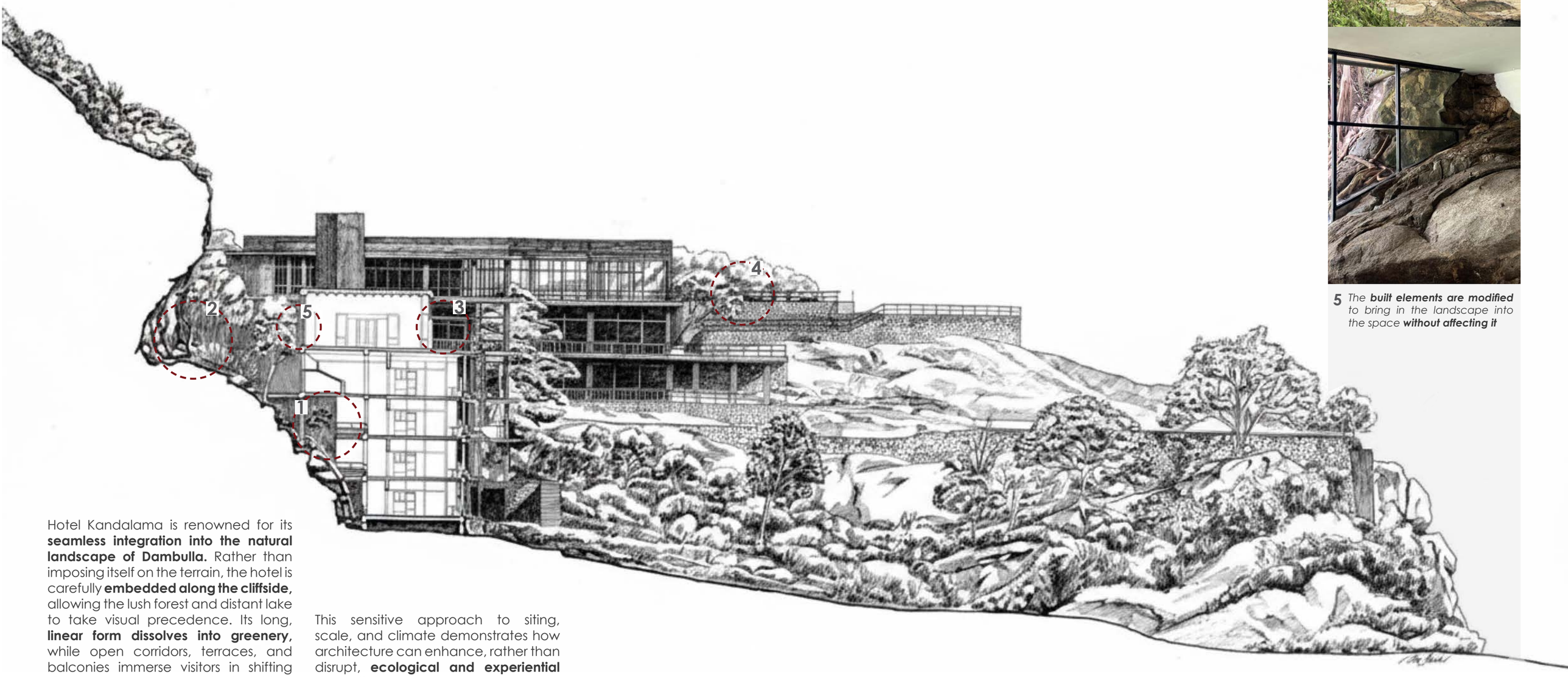
1 *The rooms hallway opens into the hillside forest rather than being 'just wall' -* ***creates multiple pause moments***

2 *The top floors open fully into the rocky hill creating a direct path into the mountain -****creating seating space there***

3 *The restaurant area has very large and wide opening into the surrounding landscape thereby* ***bringing light and breeze into the space***

4 *The pool is designed as if it is an* ***extension from the rocky landscape.*** *The trees around it also creates a* ***shading around pool***

5 *The* ***built elements are modified*** *to bring in the landscape into the space* ***without affecting it***



Hotel Kandalama is renowned for its **seamless integration into the natural landscape of Dambulla.** Rather than imposing itself on the terrain, the hotel is carefully **embedded along the cliffside,** allowing the lush forest and distant lake to take visual precedence. Its long, **linear form dissolves into greenery,** while open corridors, terraces, and balconies immerse visitors in shifting views, breezes, and sounds of wildlife.

This sensitive approach to siting, scale, and climate demonstrates how architecture can enhance, rather than disrupt, **ecological and experiential domesticity**

7. When political power shapes the landscape -

Dissolution of Domesticity

At **Sri Lankan Parliament Complex**, landscape is deployed strategically to express political distance. **Water isolates the building, reducing accessibility** and softening domestic qualities, affirming that **control of landscape directly influences social experience.**

Water acts as buffer

Restricted access for the public

Monumental Scale and Formal Symmetry

Comparative Analysis Matrix

Below is a comparative matrix table that analyzes domesticity through landscape across all the projects and periods that were covered in this narrative. The parameters reflect **spatial, climatic, sensory, and social qualities** that together define domesticity in this research.

Parameter of Domesticity	Anuradhapura	Polonnaruwa	House No. 11 Colombo	De Saram House	Lunuganga Estate	Kandalama Hotel	Sri Lankan Parliament
Relationship to Ground	Full integration; landscape is city	Terraced order; ground organizes movement	Inserted gardens within built mass	Small courtyards permeating home	Ground shaped into outdoor rooms	Building steps along cliff	Ground separated by water barrier
Human Scale & Comfort	Very high; open, familiar	Moderate; increased formal scale	High; intimate green pockets	High; private microclimates	High; human-scaled terraces	Balanced between monumental and intimate	Low; institutional scale dominates
Openness & Porosity	Fully open and dispersed	Open but formalized	High internal porosity	Semi-open with privacy	Highly porous between spaces	Open-air circulation	Controlled access, restricted openness
Climatic Responsiveness	Shade, breeze, water as comfort	Terraces for airflow and shade	Courtyards provide light & ventilation	Vegetation cools & filters air	Landscape moderates microclimate	Natural ventilation and shaded corridors	Climate dissociated from public access
Landscape as Spatial Organizer	Primary	Primary with geometry	Primary; gardens define plan	Primary; landscape penetrates home	Fundamental; land = architecture	Terrain dictates built configuration	Secondary; landscape as buffer
Movement through Landscape	Free & ritual-based	Guided sequences	Fluid visual connections	Controlled, intimate transitions	Slow, exploratory pathways	Promenade through nature	Directed, formal circulation
Sense of Belonging / Familiarity	Strong collective domesticity	Balanced with authority	Strong personal familiarity	Private domestic belonging	Emotional and sensory attachment	Collective domesticity in nature	Weak; distance and formality dominate
Role of Architecture	Minimal, framing nature	Guiding and structuring	Mediator of indoor-outdoor	Enabler of outdoor living	Background to landscape	Instrument to reveal landscape	Dominant symbol of governance
Landscape Enclosure (Vegetation)	Trees as social canopies	Vegetation supports edges	Courtyard planting encloses	Planted pockets define rooms	Canopy, hedges, vistas frame space	Forest absorbs building	Landscape used for protection and control
Domesticity Outcome	Very high	Moderate to high	High	High	Very high	High (despite scale)	Very low

Inference:

Domesticity strengthens when landscape leads and the built form listens; it weakens when architecture dominates and landscape becomes symbolic rather than inhabited.

Conclusion

Across Sri Lankan history, landscape is the medium through which architecture becomes domestic. It supports water, directs movement, and shapes climate-responsive comfort. For Sri Lankans, to dwell is not simply to reside within walls, but to occupy the land, to find home in the open. Landscape is therefore not passive ground; it is the architecture of living itself.

The Sri Lankan idea of home is not built; it is grown from the land. Domesticity here is inseparable from the ground we walk on, the shade that protects us, and the openness that allows life to spill into the outdoors. When landscape leads, architecture becomes humane, responsive to climate, attentive to the senses, and aligned with everyday rhythms of living. But when landscape is controlled, distanced, or reduced to symbolism, domesticity disappears. Through this lens, the future of Sri Lankan architecture must not be measured by the height of buildings or the polish of materials, but by how generously it preserves the freedom to inhabit the earth. Domesticity begins where walls end.

09c

DOMESTICITY THROUGH MOVEMENT:

Paths and Circulation from Ancient Capitals to Bawa

Avani Shivanandana N | PUP24058

Movement, circulation, and paths can be treated as primary architectural elements through which domesticity is achieved. Rather than functioning only as connectors, these spaces become lived-in territories where routine, pause, and familiarity develop over time. When movement is slow, continuous, and human-scaled, it allows large or open environments to feel approachable and inhabitable.

In this sense, domesticity is not defined by enclosure or private rooms, but by the everyday experience of moving through space, where repetition and bodily engagement create a sense of comfort and belonging across different scales. From Sri Lanka's ancient capitals to Geoffrey Bawa's modern works, movement through paths and circulation can be read as a continuous spatial strategy that extends domesticity across time and scale.

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02 **Ancient Capitals : Movement shaping collective Domesticity**

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A Contemporary Reintrepretation by Bawa

03 **Translation Movement becomes Human-scaled Domesticity**

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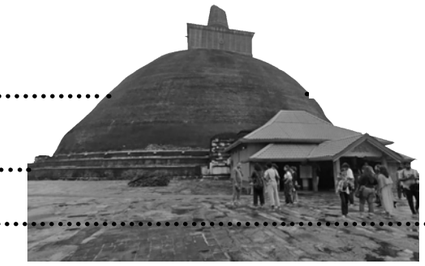
04 **Domesticity Continuum Diagram over the years**

QUALITIES OF DOMESTICITY EMERGENT THROUGH MOVEMENT

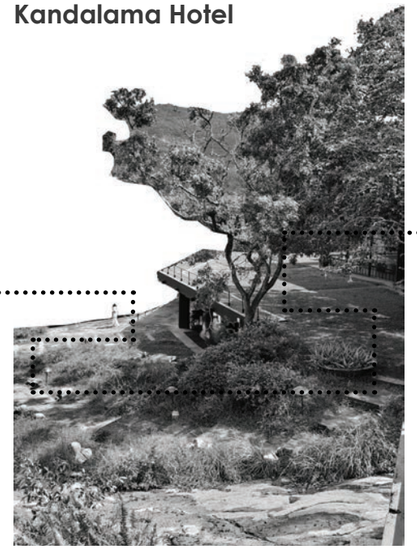
How does movement allow domesticity to operate as a continuum across different time periods ?

Routine, familiarity, pause, and human scale function as spatial qualities through which domesticity is produced by movement across different architectural contexts.

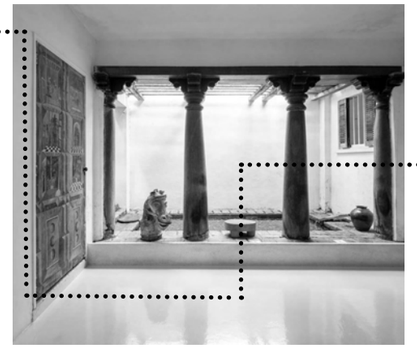
Stupa,Anuradhapura



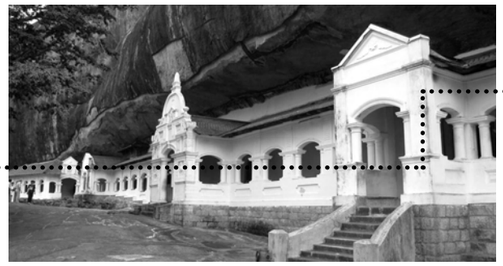
Kandalama Hotel



House 11



Dambulla Caves



01 **ROUTINE** emerges through repeated daily movement along the same paths, where circulation is experienced not as a single journey but as an everyday practice. Over time, these repeated routes become part of lived experience, allowing space to be occupied in an ordinary and domestic manner as in the case of Anuradhapura.

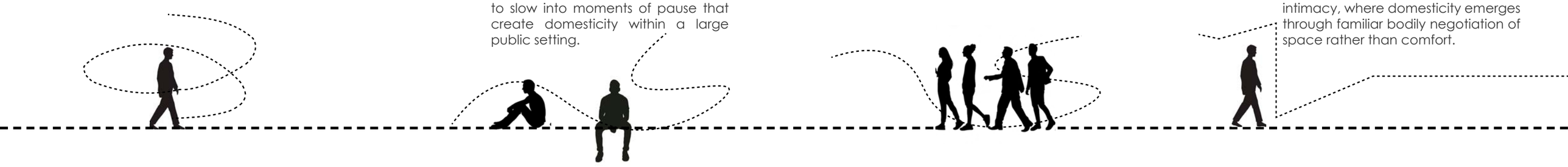
02 **PAUSE** is integral to movement-based domesticity, as moments of slowing, stopping, or lingering allow space to be inhabited rather than merely passed through. These pauses—whether intentional or incidental—introduce informality and comfort, qualities essential to domestic experience.

At Kandalama, **circulation is repeatedly interrupted by decks and water edges**, allowing movement to slow into moments of pause that create domesticity within a large public setting.

03 **FAMILIARITY** develops as movement is continuously re-enacted, enabling the body to recognise space through memory rather than visual dominance. House 11 is a strong example because domesticity there is not created by rooms as fixed objects, but through **repeated, familiar movement.**

04 **HUMAN SCALE** ensures that movement remains closely tied to the body, preventing circulation spaces from becoming overwhelming or abstract. When paths respond to bodily proportions and walking rhythms, they allow even large or open environments to feel approachable and lived-in.

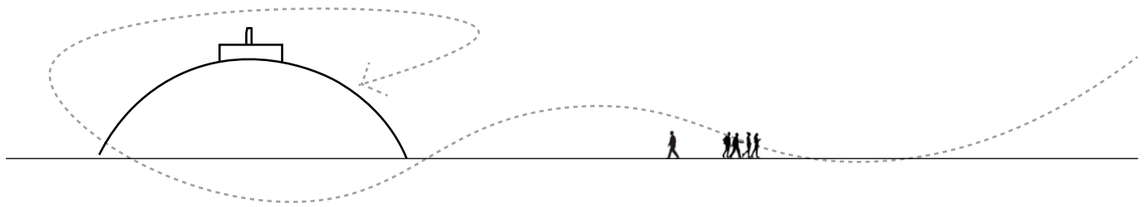
Here in case of Dambulla caves temple, Inside, **linear movement through closely scaled caves** creates intimacy, where domesticity emerges through familiar bodily negotiation of space rather than comfort.



Domesticity as a Continuum Across Eras

01 ANCIENT CAPITALS : MOVEMENT SHAPING COLLECTIVE DOMESTICITY

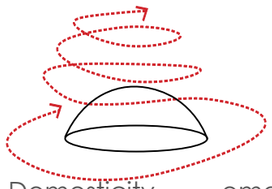
In ancient capitals such as **Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa**, domesticity is embedded within a vast open landscape structured by movement. Daily routines walking between monasteries, water bodies, stupas, and resting points transform the ground itself into inhabitable space. ***Architecture remains dispersed and secondary, while paths and pauses create a collective domestic realm***. Here, domesticity is not private or enclosed; it is shared, ritualised, and embedded in the landscape through repeated everyday movement.



ORIGINS : MOVEMENT AS RITUAL AND ROUTINE IN THE ANCIENT CAPITALS

Anuradhapura

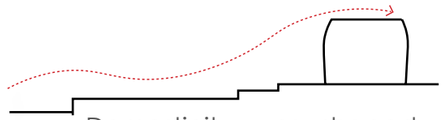
4th century BCE



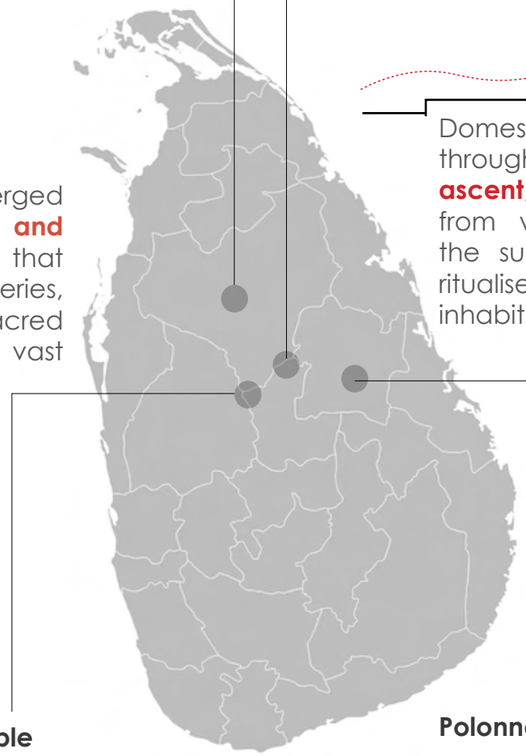
Domesticity emerged through **ritual loops and daily walking paths** that connected monasteries, water tanks, and sacred structures across a vast lived landscape.

Sigiriya Fortress

5th century CE

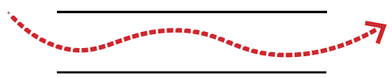


Domesticity was shaped through a **choreographed ascent**, where movement from water gardens to the summit structured a ritualised experience of inhabitation.



Dambullla cave temple

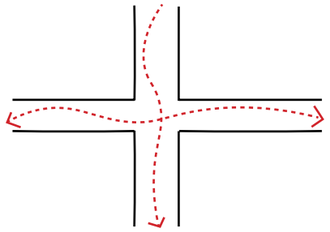
1st century BCE



Linear, bodily movement through the caves created intimacy and familiarity through close contact with rock surfaces, murals, and confined circulation.

Polonnaruwa

11th century CE



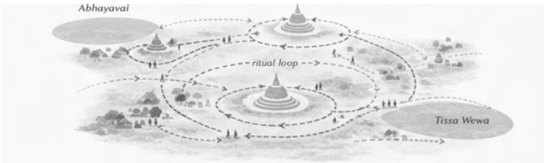
Axial and formal circulation organised civic and ritual life, producing collective domesticity

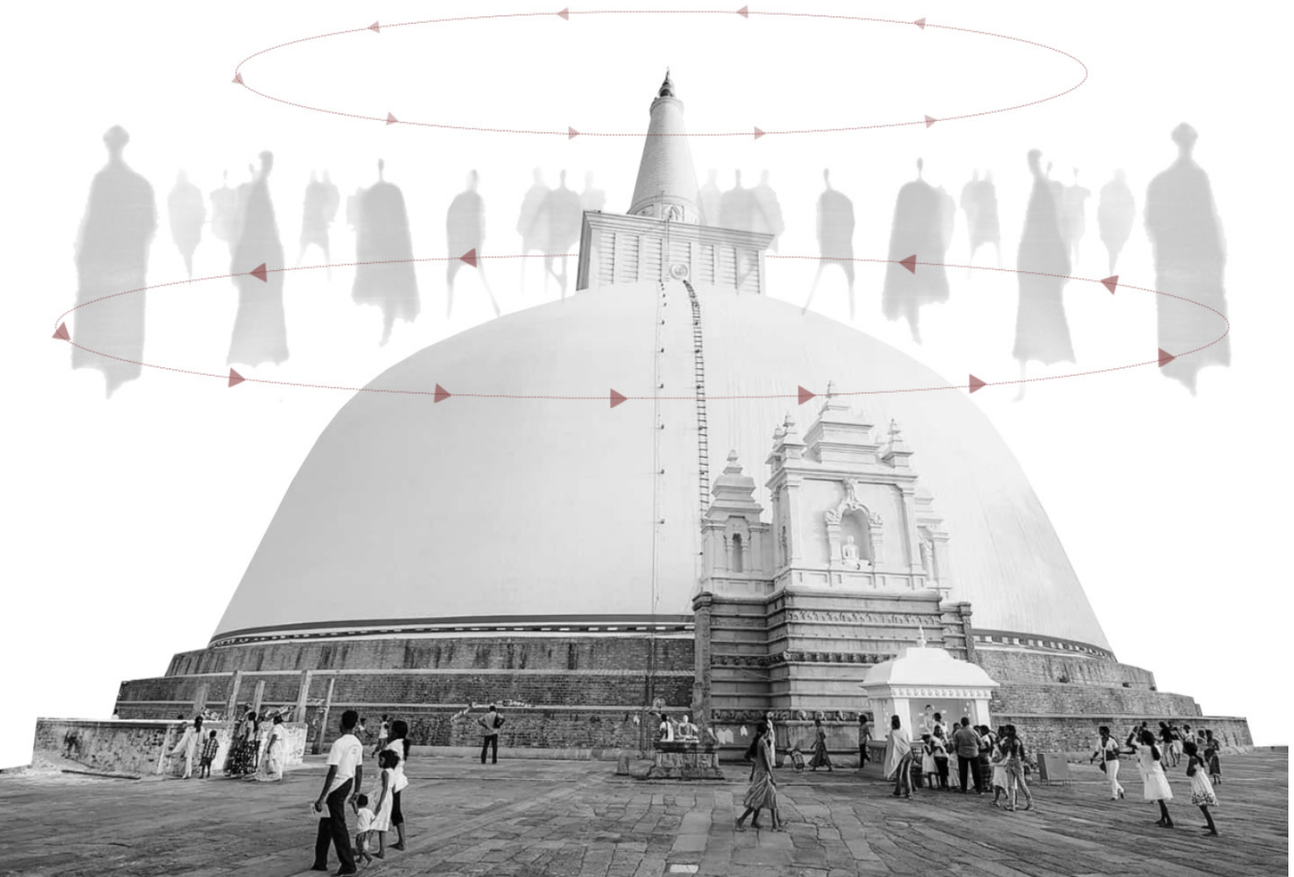
1.a **ANURADHAPURA** : 4th century BCE

Domesticity emerges at a territorial scale through repeated ritual movement between monasteries, stupas, and water tanks. Daily walking routes and circumambulation make the landscape itself a lived environment.

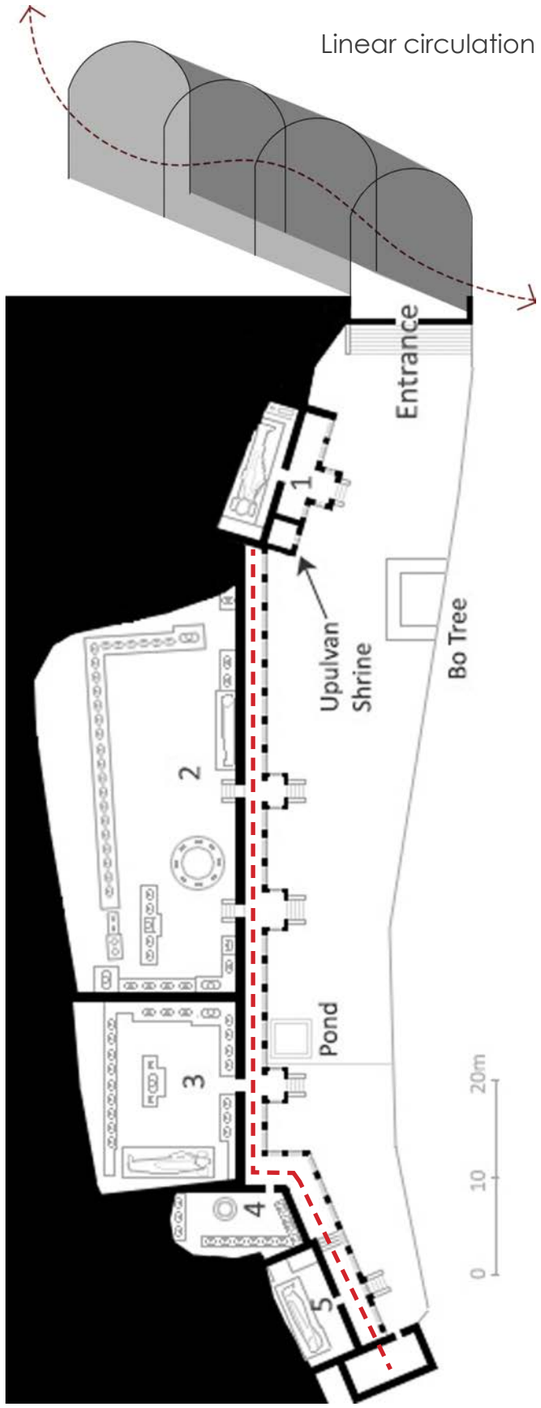
Water tanks as everyday destinations Daily-use spaces for bathing, washing, and gathering.

Shaded edges and thresholds - Monastic complexes and resting pavilions were arranged along movement routes, offering shade and pause.



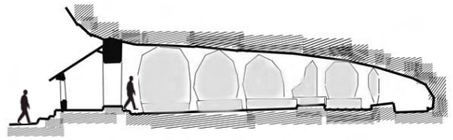


1.b DAMBULLA CAVE TEMPLES : 1st century BCE

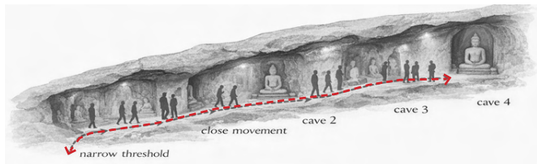


Linear and sequential circulation: Visitors move in a clear, linear progression from cave to cave, creating a predictable and repetitive path.

Close bodily proximity: Low ceilings, uneven rock surfaces, and narrow passages require visitors to adjust posture and pace.



Sectional View of the Maharaja Lena Temple



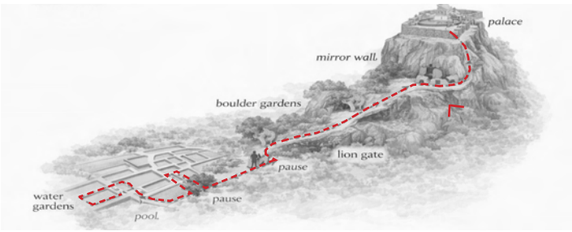
Section representing the circulation through the rocks

Here, movement becomes compressed and bodily, producing intimacy through linear circulation and proximity. **Domesticity is created through repeated physical negotiation of space rather than enclosure.**

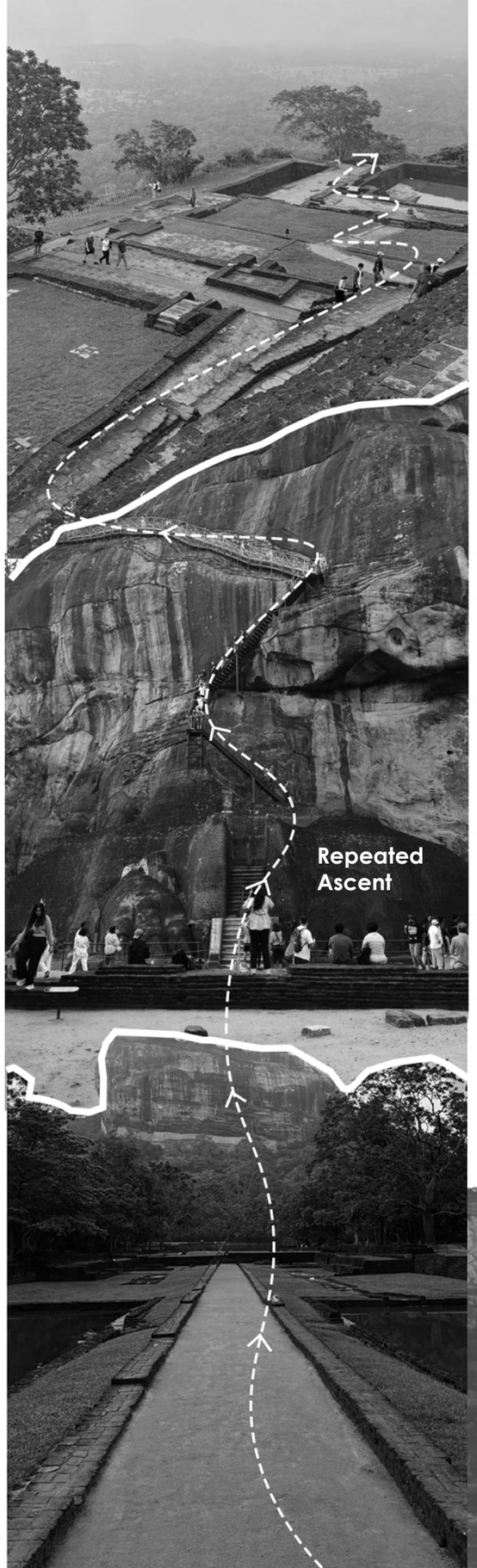
1.c SIGIRIYA ROCK FORTRESS : 5th century CE

Sequenced movement from ground to summit: The journey unfolds in deliberate stages : water gardens, boulder gardens, mirror wall, staircases creating a gradual transition from public landscape to intimate, elevated habitation

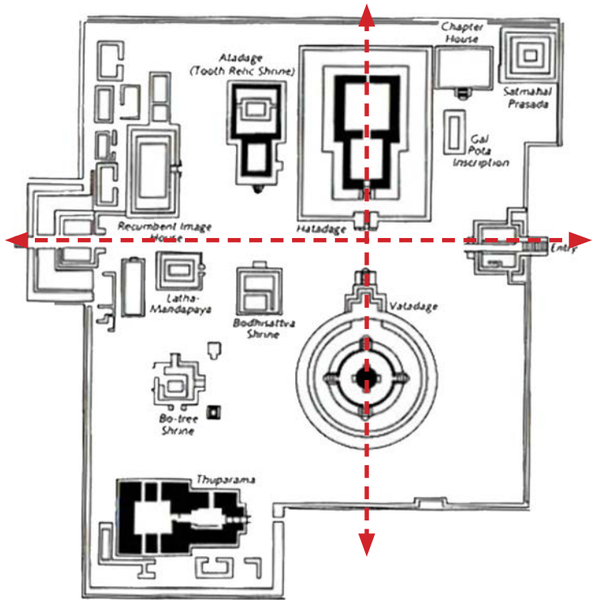
Thresholds and pauses: Narrow passages, landings, and terraces interrupt ascent, encouraging rest and bodily adjustment. These moments of pause create inhabitable thresholds that soften the scale of the fortress.



Movement is choreographed as a ritual journey, from water gardens to summit. **Domesticity emerges through repeated ascent and integration of water, landscape, and thresholds.**



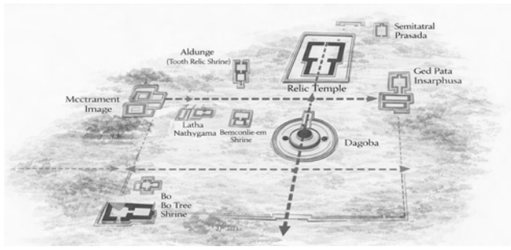
1.d POLONNARUWA : 11th century CE



Axial planning and ordered circulation: The city is structured along strong axes connecting the royal palace, religious precincts, and civic spaces.

Courts and open precincts as shared interiors: Large open spaces between structures acted like collective rooms, where movement slowed, gathered, and dispersed. These spaces supported social interaction, reinforcing **domesticity at a communal scale.**

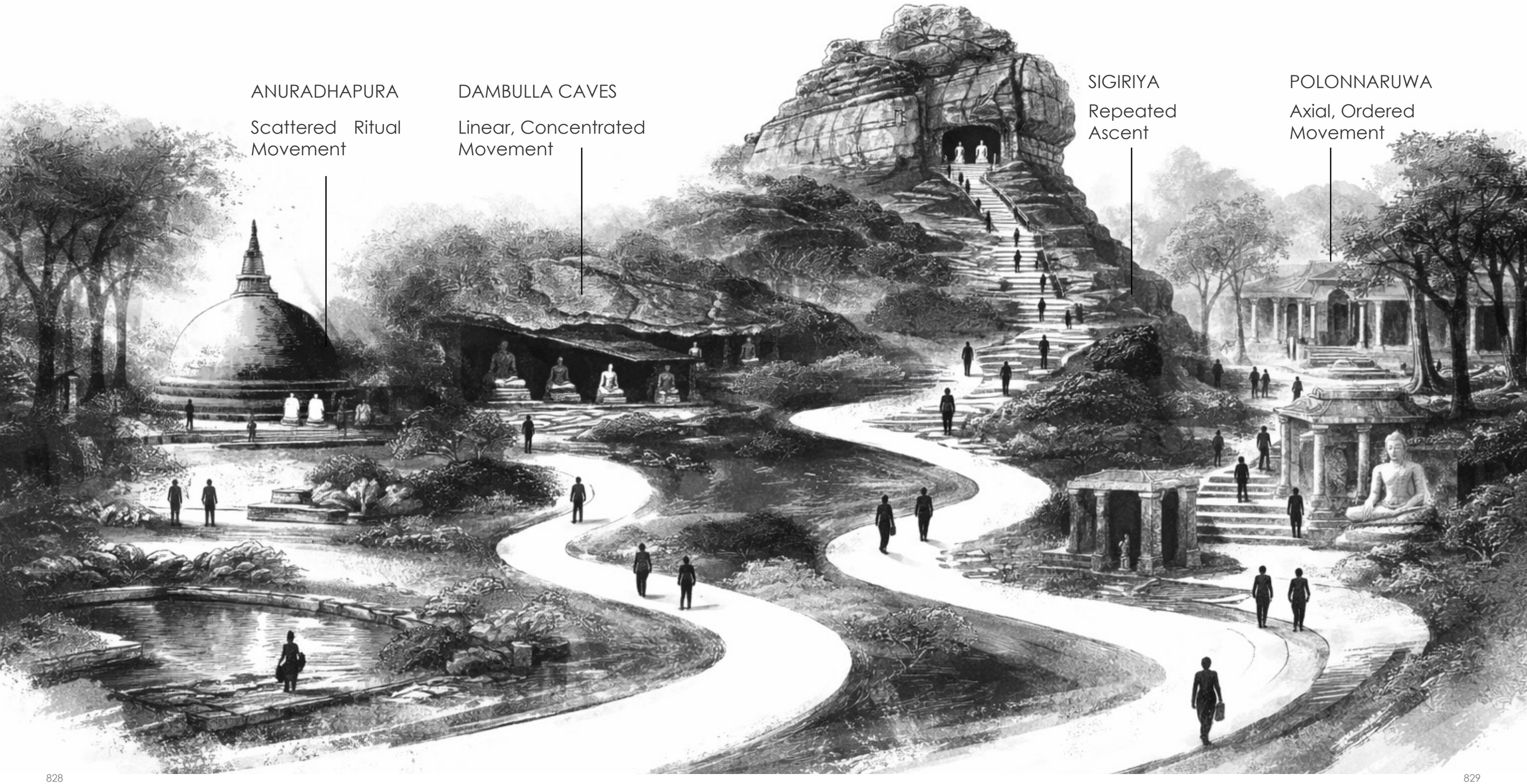
Regulated thresholds and transitions: Entry points, gateways, and changes in level controlled movement, creating moments of pause and orientation.



Movement becomes formalised and axial, reinforcing civic order. **Domesticity persists through collective routine within a controlled spatial system.**

Across Anuradhapura, Dambulla, Sigiriya, and Polonnaruwa, domesticity emerges not through enclosed buildings but through movement itself. Whether scattered, linear, ascending, or axial, each capital uses paths, thresholds, and repeated bodily journeys to transform landscape into lived space. Through walking, pausing, and ritual circulation, territory becomes familiar, humane, and inhabited revealing movement as the primary medium through which domesticity is continuously produced across time.

> *Through repeated movement across terrain, water, and thresholds, ancient capitals turned* ***territory into lived domestic space****.*

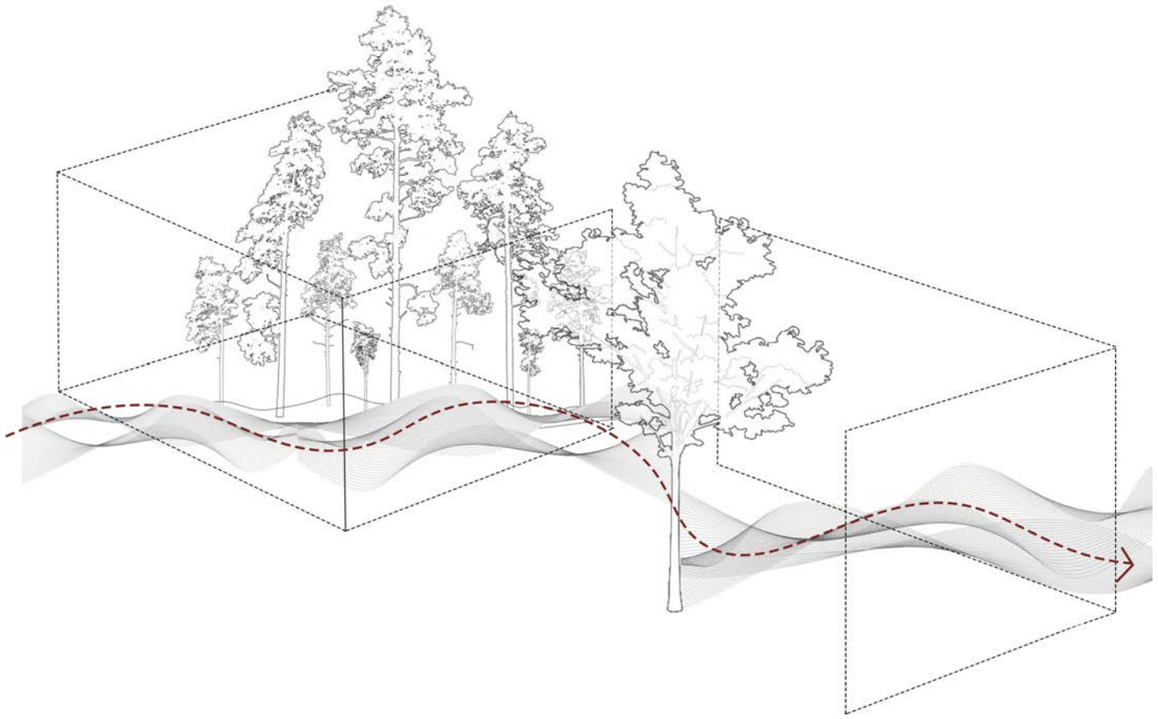


Domesticity as a Continuum Across Eras

02 TRANSLATION MOVEMENT BECOMES HUMAN -SCALED DOMESTICITY

Domesticity continues to emerge through the simple act of moving through space, much as it did in earlier periods. When paths are repeated daily, when movement slows to allow pause, or when the body remains closely aware of walls, thresholds, and landscape, spaces begin to feel familiar and lived-in.

Across time, from expansive ritual routes to intimate everyday paths, ***movement acts as the connecting tissue between architecture and life,*** turning space into a lived, domestic environment rather than a static form.

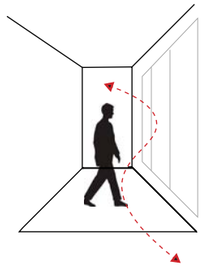


DOMESTICITY ACROSS TIME: *A Contemporary Reintrepretation by Bawa*

DE SARAM HOUSE

Geoffrey Bawa

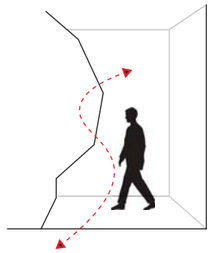
Circulation is tight and sequential, with narrow corridors, thresholds, and low ceilings shaping bodily awareness. This recalls the tactile, bodily movement of cave and monastic spaces

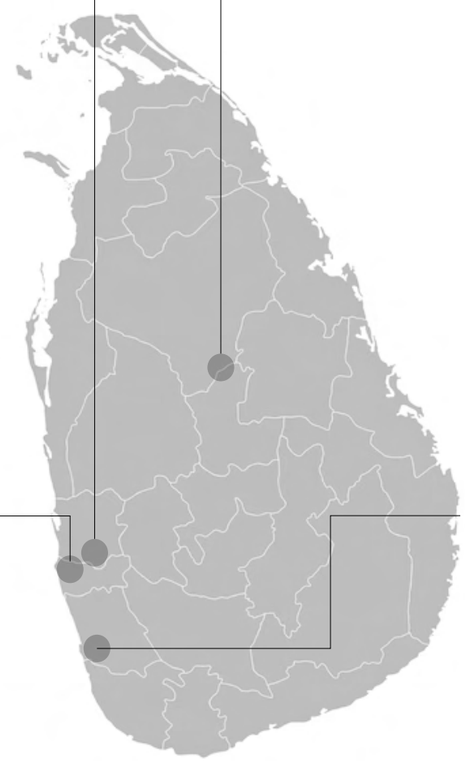


KANDALAMA HOTEL

Geoffrey Bawa

Circulation follows the exposed rock-cut edge, recalling ancient cave temples, where movement unfolds along the landscape and pause, shade, and familiarity

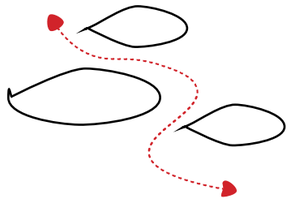




HOUSE 11

Geoffrey Bawa

Movement is organized as **short, looping routes between verandahs, courtyards, and rooms.** Reinterpreting the ritual loops of ancient settlements at a domestic scale.

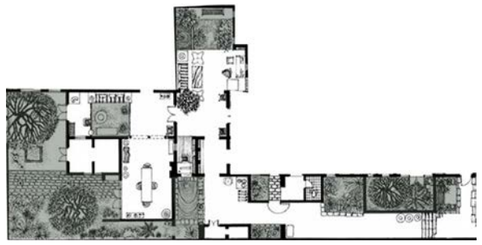


LUNUGANGA

Geoffrey Bawa

Movement unfolds slowly through a series of outdoor rooms connected by paths, steps, and pauses. Domesticity emerges through walking and dwelling in the landscape, echoing ancient garden and territorial movement traditions.

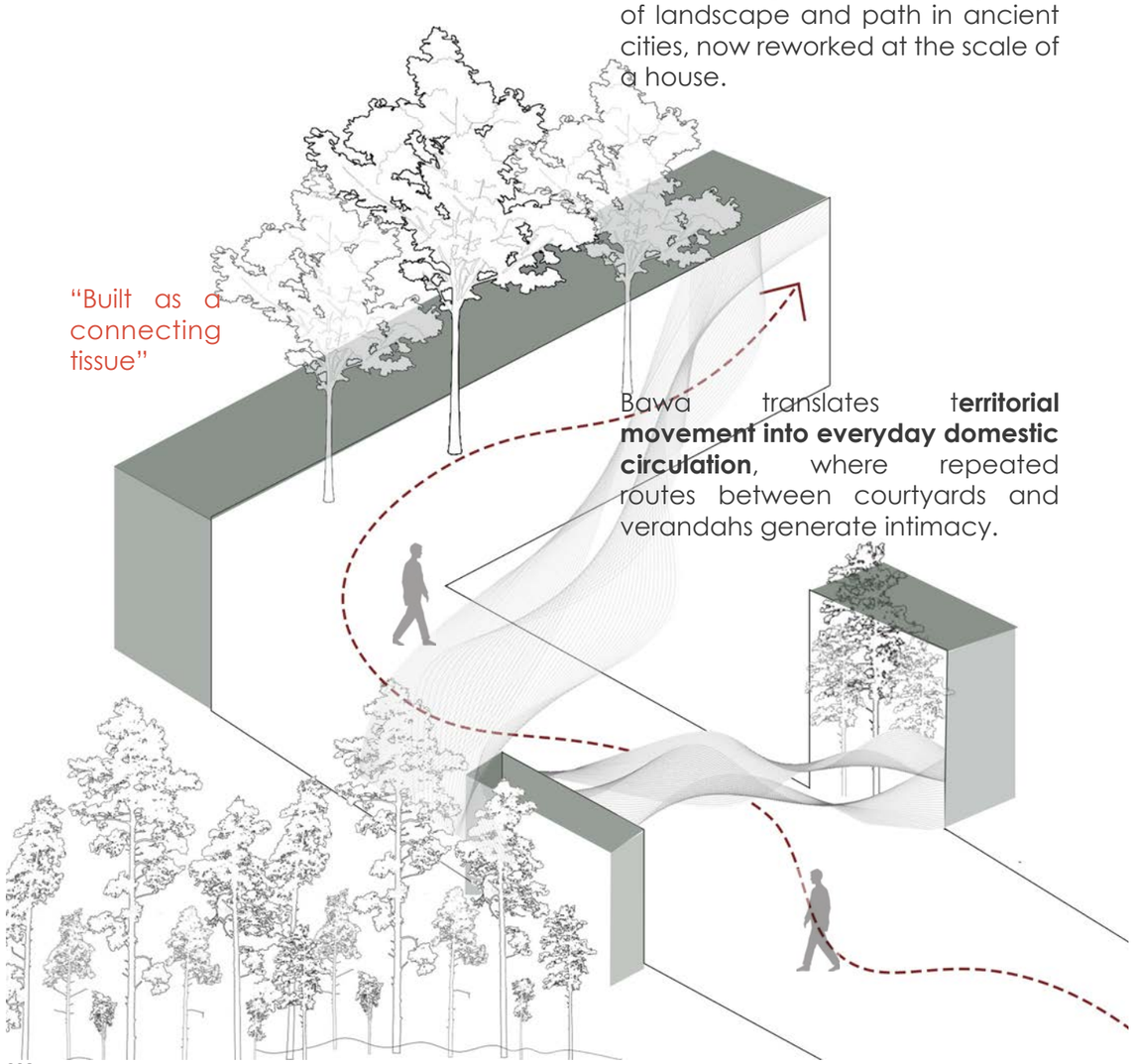
2.a HOUSE 11 , GEOFFREY BAWA



Part Plan- Built as a connecting tissue that frames and mediates the surrounding nature

Courtyard-centered circulation: Circulation loops around open courts rather than through enclosed corridors. This echoes the historical emphasis on open-to-sky spaces—seen in monastery complexes and palace gardens—where movement unfolds around voids instead of enclosed rooms.

Landscape as part of circulation: Views, vegetation, and light accompany movement at every turn, echoing the historic integration of landscape and path in ancient cities, now reworked at the scale of a house.

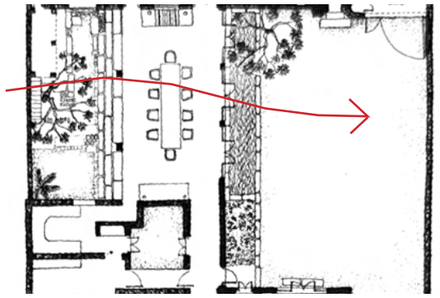


Bawa translates t**erritorial movement into everyday domestic circulation**, where repeated routes between courtyards and verandahs generate intimacy.

2.b DE SARAM HOUSE

Short, deliberate paths: Movement in De Saram House is slow and close to the body, with short paths and tight thresholds that make space feel personal and familiar, reinterpreting the intimate, bodily movement found in historic interiors at a domestic scale.

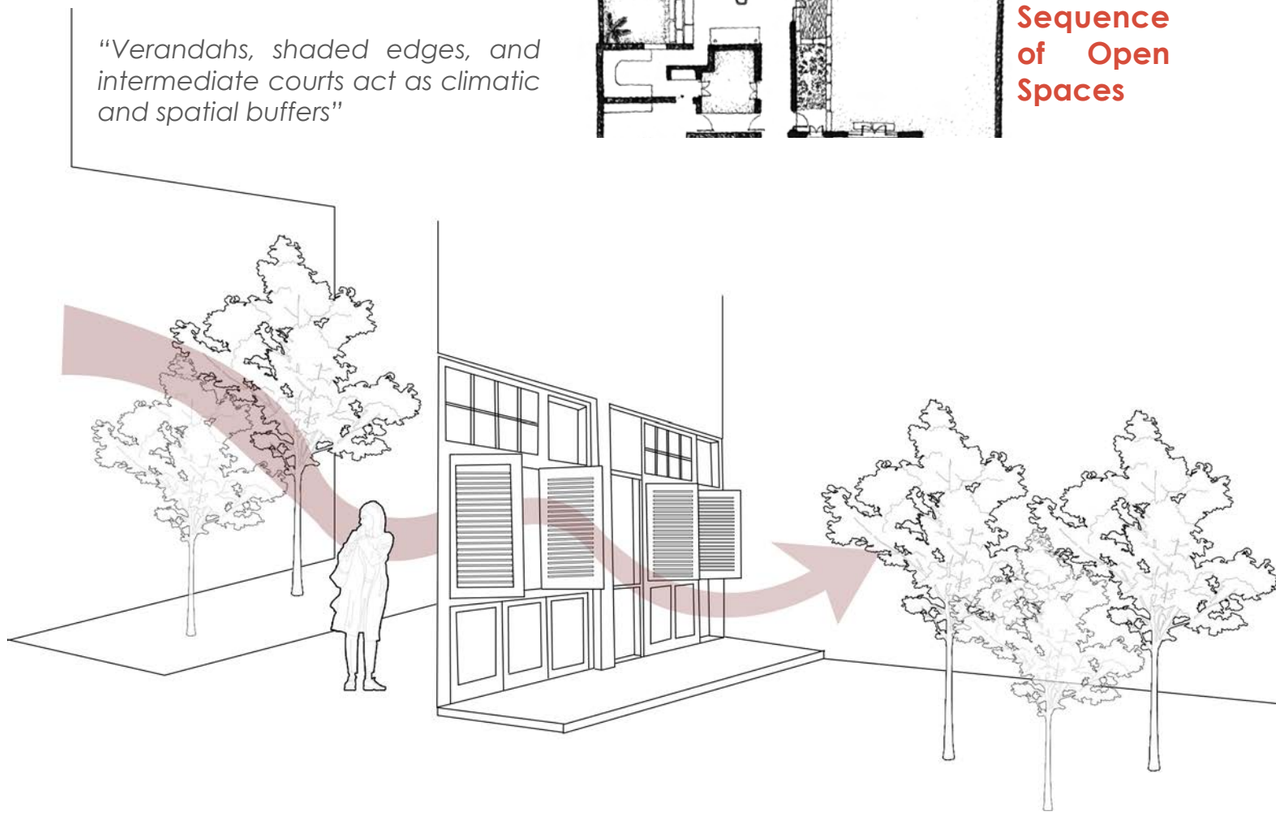
Historic principles of bodily movement are refined into **tight thresholds and short paths**, ensuring domestic comfort through proportion.



Linking Built Form Through a

Sequence of Open Spaces

"Verandahs, shaded edges, and intermediate courts act as climatic and spatial buffers"

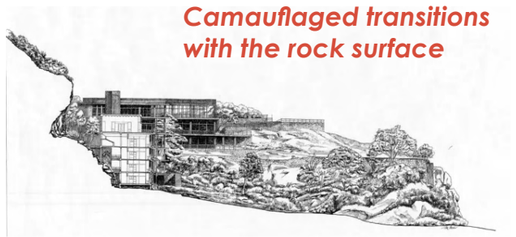


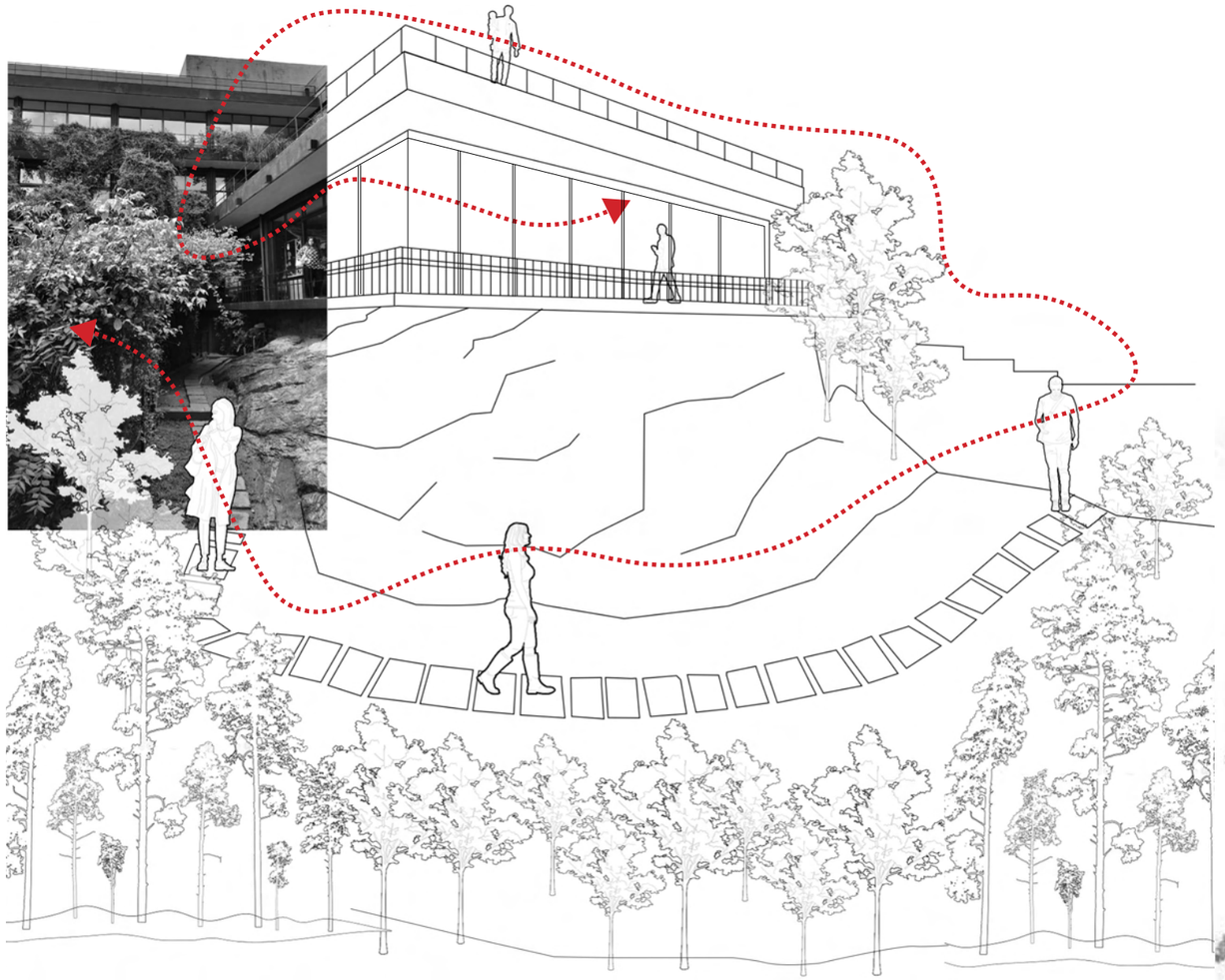
2.c KANDALAMA HOTEL

Camouflaged Transitions within Nature - Circulation is carefully embedded within the natural landscape, allowing paths, verandahs, and shaded edges to blend seamlessly with existing vegetation. Built elements recede visually, ensuring that **movement feels guided by nature** rather than architecture.

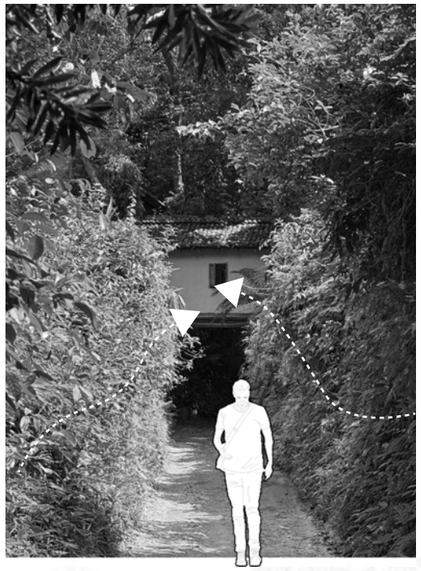
This camouflage softens spatial boundaries and reduces visual dominance, making the transition feel instinctive and unobtrusive.

Ancient processional movement is reinterpreted through interrupted circulation, where pause creates inhabitable moments within a large structure.





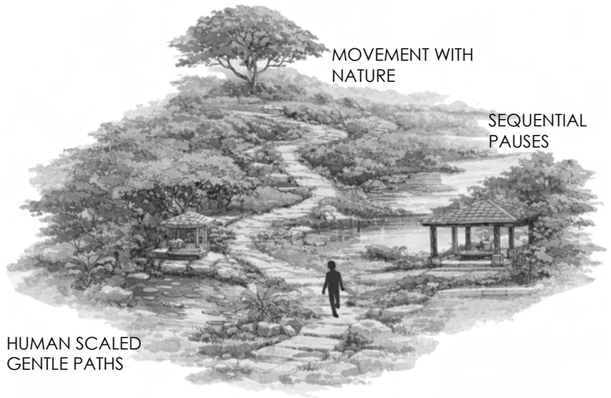
2.d LUNUGANGA, BENTOTA

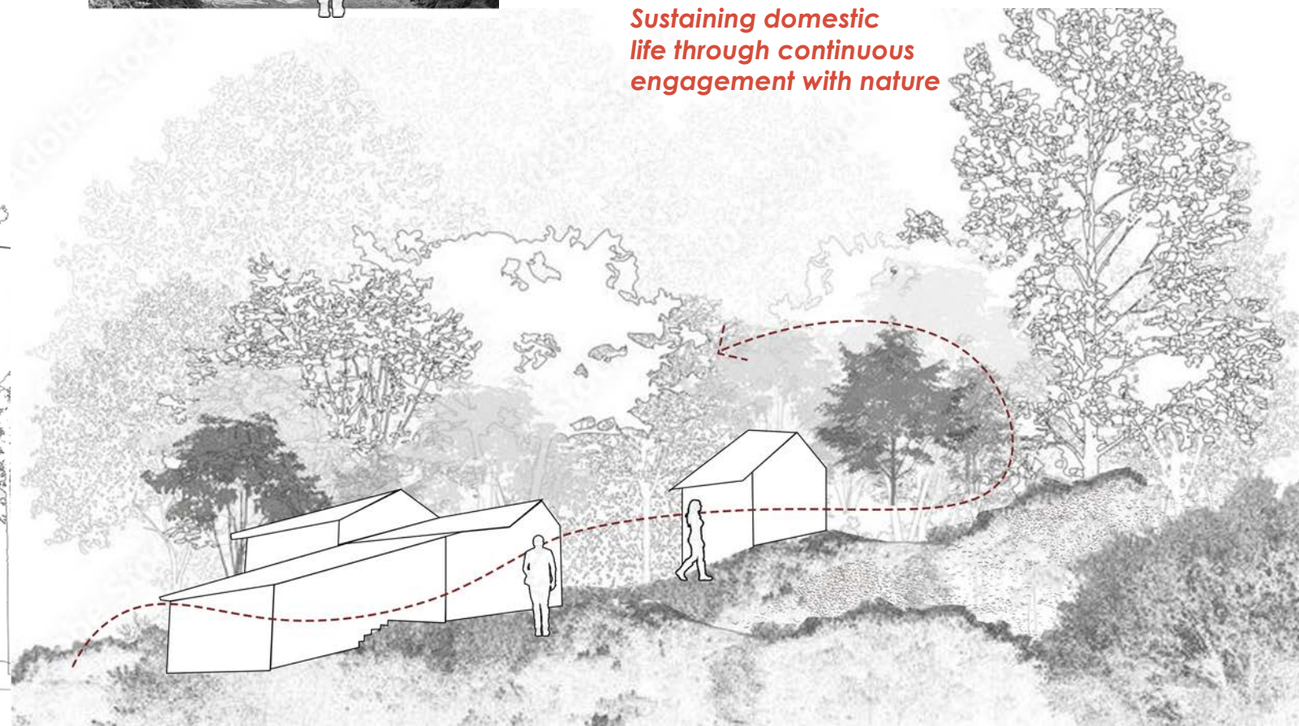


Sequential pauses as living spaces - Benches, pavilions, water edges, and framed views act as pauses along paths. These moments of rest become places to sit, reflect, and gather, turning circulation itself into inhabitable space.

Movement at Lunuganga is broken into segments which are at different levels

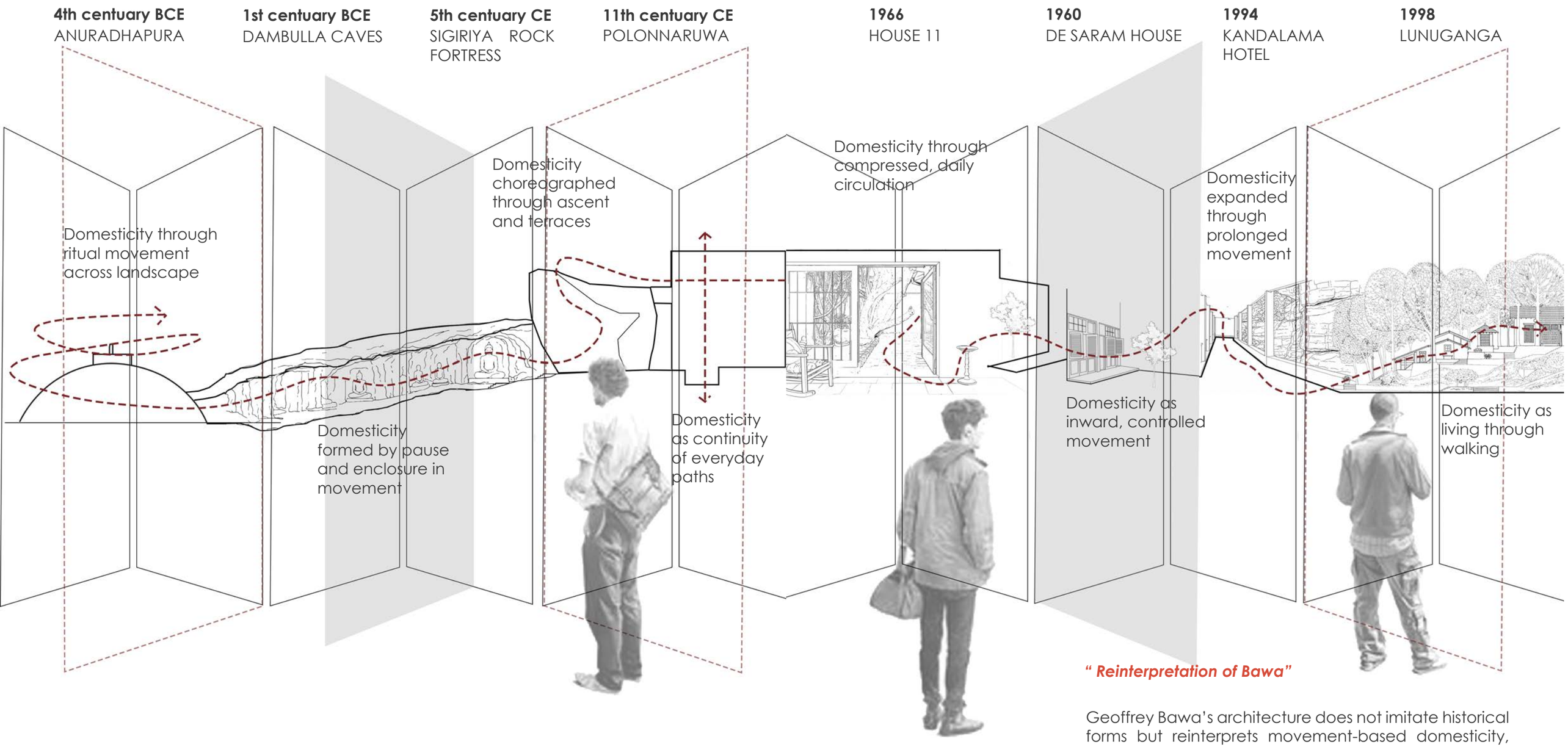
Movement itself becomes the domestic act, **echoing ancient landscape-based habitation.**





Domesticity Continuum Diagram over the years

" Movement as a lived sequence"



" Reinterpretation of Bawa"

Geoffrey Bawa's architecture does not imitate historical forms but reinterprets movement-based domesticity, **translating ancient territorial and ritual circulation into human-scaled, everyday experience**. This continuity reveals domesticity in Sri Lanka as a living spatial tradition, sustained through movement across centuries.

10

From Tradition to Modernity

A Study of Sri Lankan Architectural Language

Group 10
Samhita, Sukriti, Pratyakshi

Sri Lankan architecture consistently shows the interdependant relationship between, material, climate, and lived experience, across centuries.

This project analyzes how materials, along with associated architectural elements and details, persist from historic environments to contemporary practice, forming a coherent architectural language over time.

Through the work of Geoffrey Bawa, the project demonstrates how tradition is replicated but at the same time, also reinterpreted where familiar materials and elements are reimagined to create architecture that is simultaneously rooted in the past and responsive to contemporary life.

10a

Between The Pillar and the Pendant

A journey through Srilanka's built heritage

Kamma Naga Samhita

Imagine an object: a curved, elegant form cast in brass. In the palm of your hand, it is a piece of jewelry an earring catching the light. Held against a drape of a reed screen, it becomes a curtain holder, a functional anchor for the tropical breeze. Scaled up once more in timber, it transforms into a bench in a garden, inviting the body to rest. This fluidity of scale is the secret language of Geoffrey Bawa. It is a language that began not in the 20th century, but in the stone-carved mastery of Anuradhapura and the gravity-defying heights of Sigiriya. To understand Sri Lankan architecture is to realize that a building is simply an object you can walk inside of, and an object is simply a building you can carry with you.

1.Anuradhapura and Polonoruwa :

The Object as the Monument

In the ancient context of the Lovamahapaya, the pillar was a symbol of endurance. These were not just supports; they were "Stone Trees" meant to last for eternity. The scale was extrospective ,it forced your gaze upward toward the heavens and outward toward the vastness of the monastic city.

When one stands in that forest of 1,600 pillars today, one feels the "weight" of time. The gap between the pillars is wide enough for a procession, but the height is designed to make the human form feel like a mere shadow passing through.

The Bawa Translation: The "Pillar as a Companion"

When Bawa brings this motif into 33rd Lane, he changes the scale from Extrospective (Outer World) to Introspective (Inner World).

The Proximity of the Body: In the ancient ruins, you observe the pillars from a distance. In a Bawa corridor, the pillars are often within arm's reach. As you walk, the rhythm of the pillars mimics the pace of a heartbeat or a slow stroll.

The Material Softening: By moving from the cold, "immortal" granite of Anuradhapura to the warm, "living" timber of a recycled colonial house, Bawa humanizes the structure. The pillar is no longer a monument; it is a piece of furniture you can lean against.

Framing the Void: Just as the ancient pillars created a "grid of air," Bawa uses his columns to frame specific "designed moments"a single fern, a pool of water, or a shaft of light. He realized that the pillar's true job isn't to hold up the roof, but to measure the space for the person walking through it.

In the narrative of Sri Lankan architecture, if Anuradhapura is the "Forest" and Sigiriya is the "Mountain," then Dambulla is the "Womb."

3.Sigiriya:

The Landscape as a "Found Object"

At Sigiriya, the "object" (the lion) is so large that it becomes the "building" (the entrance).

The Scale of Transformation: Normally, we think of a door as a hole in a wall. At Sigiriya, the "door" is the space between two massive, sculpted claws.

The Mirror Wall: The Mirror Wall is perhaps the most "Modernist" element of the ancient world. It is a masonry wall coated in a lime plaster so highly polished that the King could see himself as he walked past.

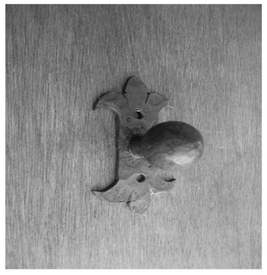
Bringing the Sky Down: By creating a reflective surface on a massive scale, the architects "shrank" the sky. They brought the clouds and the horizon down to a 1:1 human scale.

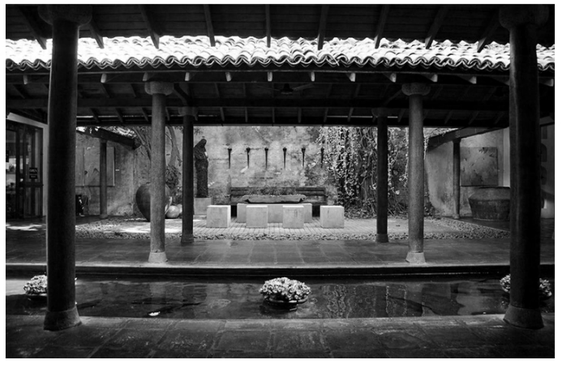
The Bawa Connection: Bawa was a master of the "Reflecting Pool" and polished cement (titanium) floors. In projects like the Kandalama or 33rd Lane, his dark, polished floors act exactly like the Mirror Wall. They reflect the garden, the trees, and the inhabitant, blurring the boundary between the solid ground and the ethereal sky.

The Water Gardens: The Water Gardens at Sigiriya are a masterclass in Axial Symmetry. In the middle of a chaotic, unpredictable jungle, the architects laid out perfectly rectangular pools and underground hydraulic pipes.

The Psychological Scale: The gardens are designed to make you feel "ordered." The sound of the fountains (which still work during the monsoon) provides a constant, rhythmic scale of sound that masks the noise of the wild forest.

The Bawa Connection: Bawa took this "ordered water" and scaled it down into the Courtyard Tank. In almost every Bawa house, there is a moment where the "wild" garden meets a perfectly square, still body of water. He uses the Sigiriya scale of "Symmetry vs. Jungle" to create a sense of





4.Colonial Architecture:

The Scale of the "In-Between"

The Colonial era (Portuguese, Dutch, and British) introduced a scale of functional intimacy. It moved away from the monumental and focused on how a house "breathes."

The Verandah as the Modern Cave: Just as Dambulla provided a "pocket" of protection from the sun, the Colonial verandah created a shaded buffer zone. It is a scale designed for the human body at rest sipping tea, reading, or watching the rain.

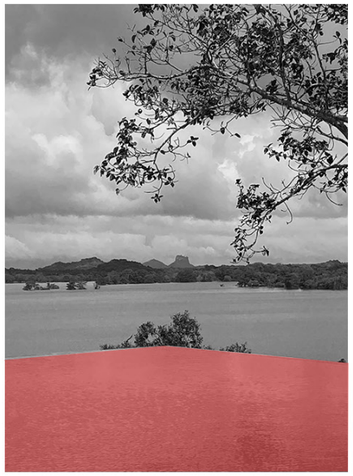
The Scale of the Detail: Colonial architecture was obsessed with "Hardware"brass locks, window stays, and oversized keys. These were functional objects that were scaled to be beautiful to the touch.

The Juxtaposition: The "Anchor" of the Room to follow the marker's suggestion, we juxtapose the Colonial Latch with Bawa's Brass Object.

Colonial Detail: A heavy, ornate Dutch brass window stay. It is a small piece of "jewelry for the house" that holds a massive window open against the sea breeze.

Bawa Detail: The Brass Curtain Holder (and its earring counterpart). Bawa takes the functional weight of the colonial latch and strips it down to its most elegant, essential curve.

The Narrative Insight: Bawa realized that the "Soul" of a colonial house wasn't in its thick walls, but in its contact points. By wearing the curtain holder as an earring, we are literally "wearing" a piece of architectural hardware. It proves that the scale of the hand (the earring) and the scale of the house (the curtain holder) are identical in his design philosophy.



5.The Tropical Modernism :

The Relation of Bawa and his objects.

In the world of Geoffrey Bawa, a design is never static; it is a traveler. He possessed a unique "scalar imagination," where a form was not defined by its size, but by its proportion and cultural resonance. This narrative explores how Bawa took objects steeped in Sri Lankan heritage and "stretched" or "compressed" them to bridge the gap between ancient stone and modern skin.

1. The Migration of the Triangle: to an Object

In Bawa's design language, a motif never stays "large." He took the stability and sacredness of the cultural triangle of sigirya , dambulla and anuradhapura in Kandalama and "shrank" it into the objects we interact with.

The Triangular Stool/Table: Bawa often designed furniture in Kandalama using three legs or triangular supports. This wasn't just for stability; it was a repetition of the "Cultural Triangle" logic.

The Narrative Link: By wearing or touching a triangular object, the inhabitant is connected to the monumental "Triangle" of the house, which in turn is connected to the "Cultural Triangle" of the nation. It is a nested hierarchy of meaning.

10b

Continuities in Srilankan Architecture

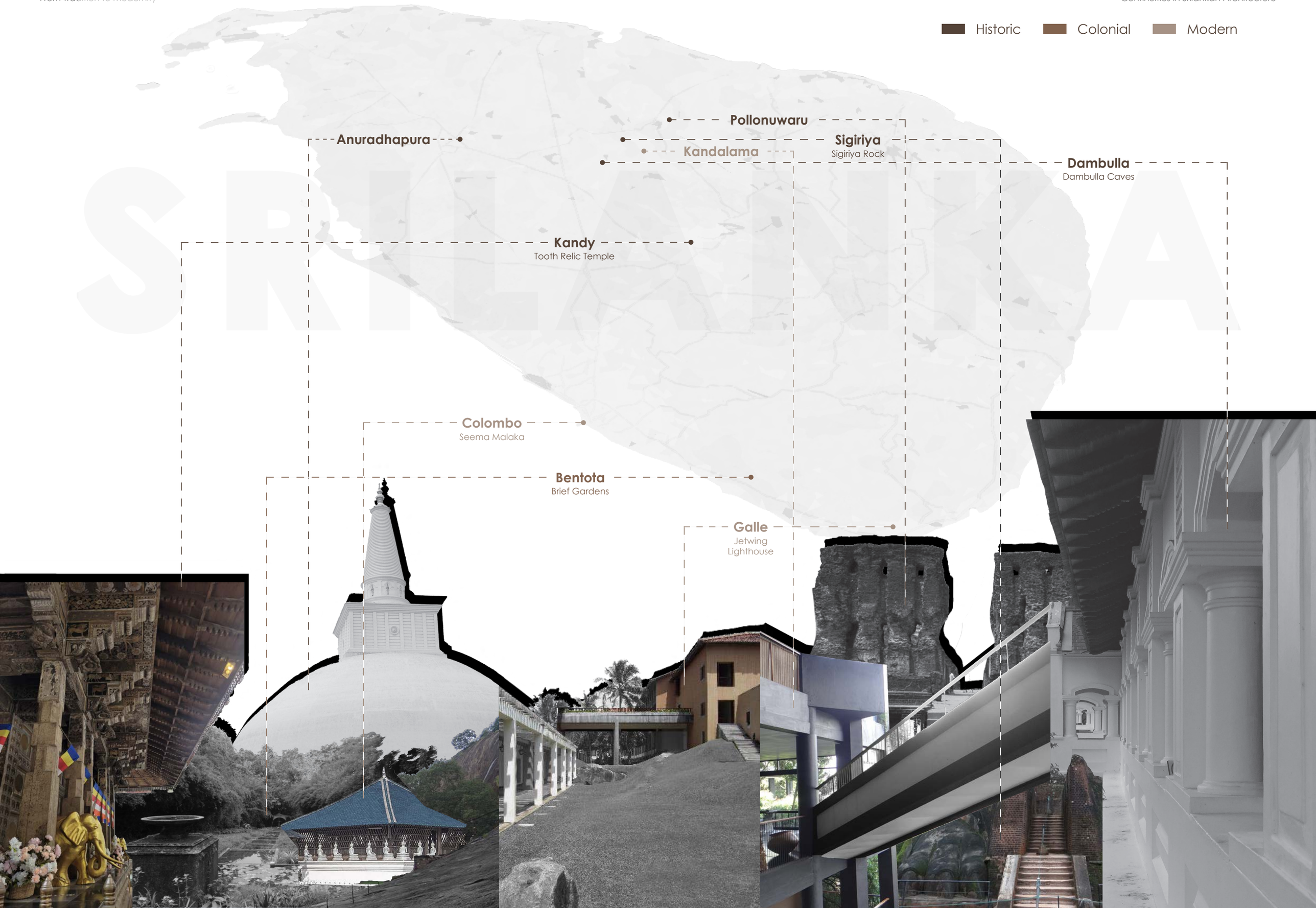
Sukriti Saraf

Srilankan Architecture is all about experiencing spaces. Across history buildings- both ancient and modern are shaped as journeys, guiding one slowly through space. Sometimes this journey is deliberate, sometimes institutional but one can always feel it. This study reads Srilankan Architecture as a lived experience beginning at the moment of entry, unfolding through movement and pause and settling into spaces with time.

By understanding architecture as a series of experiences , this study ***compares*** historical, colonial and contemporary projects to understand how similar ***architectural events*** recur with different expressions but similar intentions.

Across ancient, colonial, and contemporary works, Sri Lankan architecture reveals a shared intention: to be entered slowly, experienced through movement and pause, seen with care, and absorbed over time.

Historic Colonial Modern



01 ENTERING

The first architectural event; entering is ***never sudden*** in Srilanka Architecture.

Entry is designed as a slow act of arrival. It prepares the mind and body to disconnect from the outside before revealing itself.

It shifts the visitor from one state to another : noise to calm, open to close, public to private.

The act of entering is choreographed making the visitor consciously aware of the journey ahead.

02 MOVING

In the Sri Lankan tradition, movement is the ***narrative*** of the building.

A path is never a straight line, it is a rhythmic ***journey of discovery.***

Once inside, the architecture dictates the pace. Corridors bend, courtyards interrupt paths, and changes in light and texture guide the body.

Each turn reveals a new layer,ensuring that the space is never perceived all at once, but rather as a story that reveals itself one step at a time.

03 PAUSING

The pause is where the architecture ***breathes.***

These are the intentional intervals where architecture asks you to stop; steps, platforms, courtyards, verandahs, and shaded edges.

These spaces are designed for calibration; they allow the eyes to adjust to the light and the mind to settle into the atmosphere.

Across eras, architecture consistently creates spaces that slow time.

04 LOOKING

Architecture here acts as a ***curated lens***.

Looking is not a passive act but a deliberate event.

Carvings, sculptures, and ornamentation demand attention , shifting the focus inward.

These vistas are often revealed suddenly or through narrow apertures, creating moments of visual surprise inviting visitors to engage, interpret, and imagine.

05 ABSORBING

The final chapter reflects on how architecture ***changes*** over time.

Here, the distinction between the built and the unbuilt begins to vanish. To absorb a space is to reach a point where the architecture becomes an extension of the site.

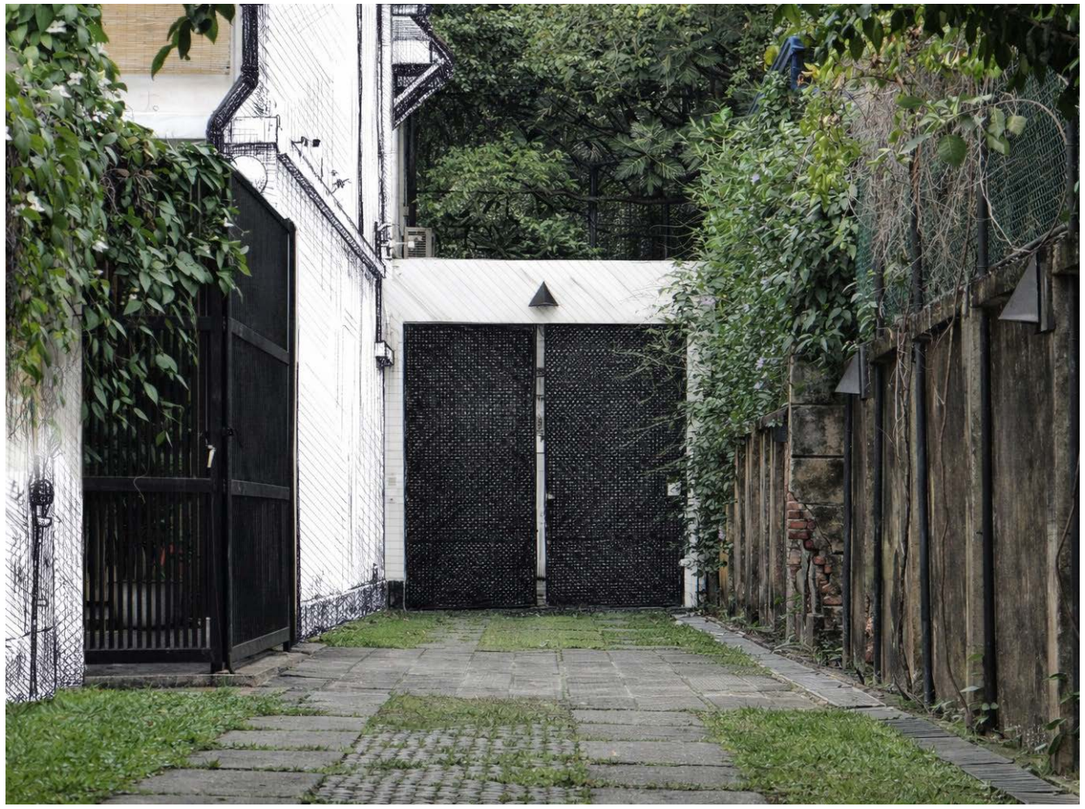
Materials weather, vegetation grows, and buildings merge further into their landscapes. Architecture accepts time rather than resisting it. The traveller is no longer an observer of the architecture; they are a part of the living environment it has created.

Sigiriya Rock
477-495 AD

Entry is lined with water bodies, fountains, gardens and changes in ground level. By the time, one reaches the main Sigiriya Rock, they are awed by the scale and beauty of place ***forgetting*** the outside world.

De Saram House
1986

An intimate entrance, hidden in one of the side lanes of Colombo, one almost misses it. But this ***long*** walk into isolation and peace allows the noise on the main street to slowly fade away. It slows one down before approaching the space for retreat and reflection.

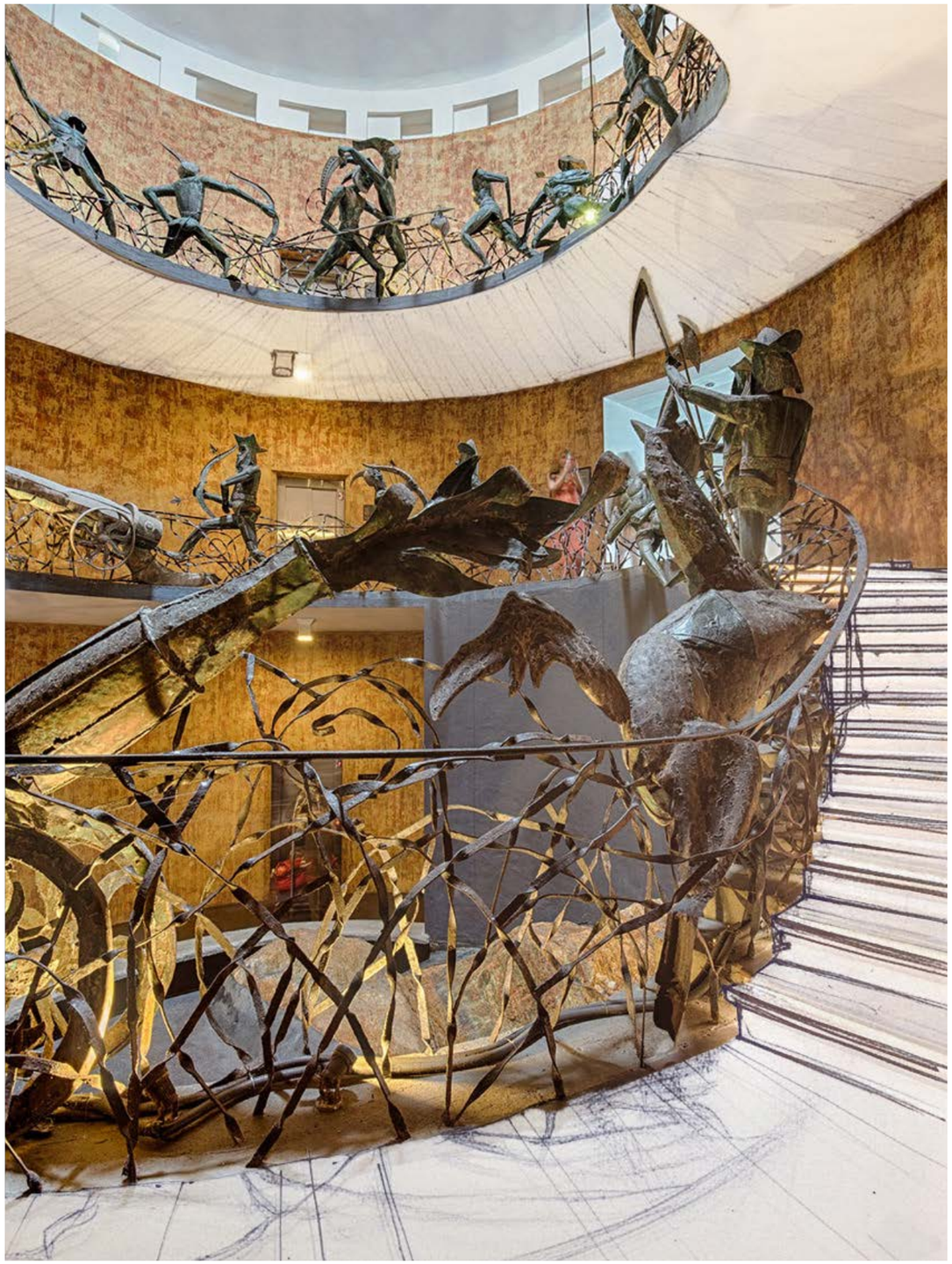


Sri Maha Bodhi Tree, Annuradhapura
4th Century BCE

The intricate carvings on the staircase divert the attention in a way that one enters the spiritual world. It becomes a ***threshold*** rather than a passageway. Intricate carvings line the steps, gently diverting attention from the act of walking to the act of entering another state of mind. Each step slows the body, preparing it for the sacred space ahead.

Jetwing Lighthouse, Galle
1997

Highly decorated staircase diverts attention and makes one charged and accelerates the body. Here, the staircase becomes an ***event*** and the visitor becomes a part of the whole drama.



Dambulla Caves
1st-3rd Century BCE

The climb is a deliberate straining of the body. As the visitor ascends the 160-meter rock, the physical exertion serves to slow the mind. The natural ***topography*** dictates the pace of the journey, ensuring the lived experience is one of gradual revelation rather than immediate exposure.

Brief Gardens, Bentota
1929

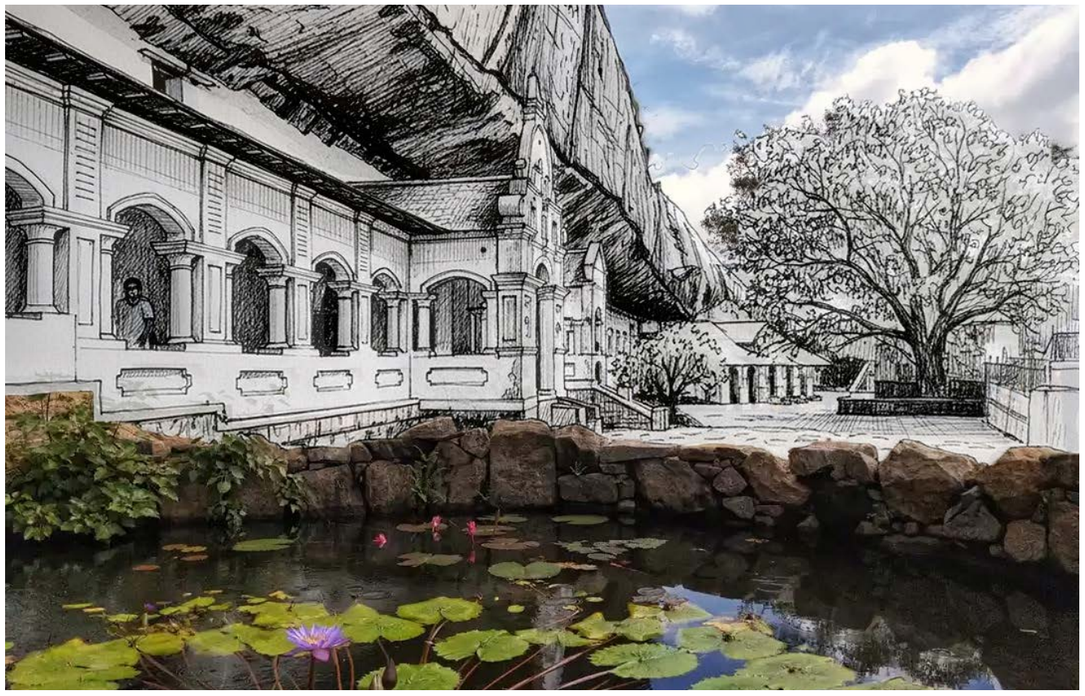
The stairs leading one into wilderness. It becomes an experience rather than just a passage. At each step one thinks about the where is it leading. ***What next one will see ?***- The decorative art waiting to be discovered like hidden treasure or the interesting vistas at each turn.

Sigiriya Rock
477-495 AD

Terraces at ***different levels*** actuates excitement and energy to experience the spaces from different levels. Each point on the terrace has a different viewpoint. The body becomes aware of scale, direction, and elevation through continuous movement.

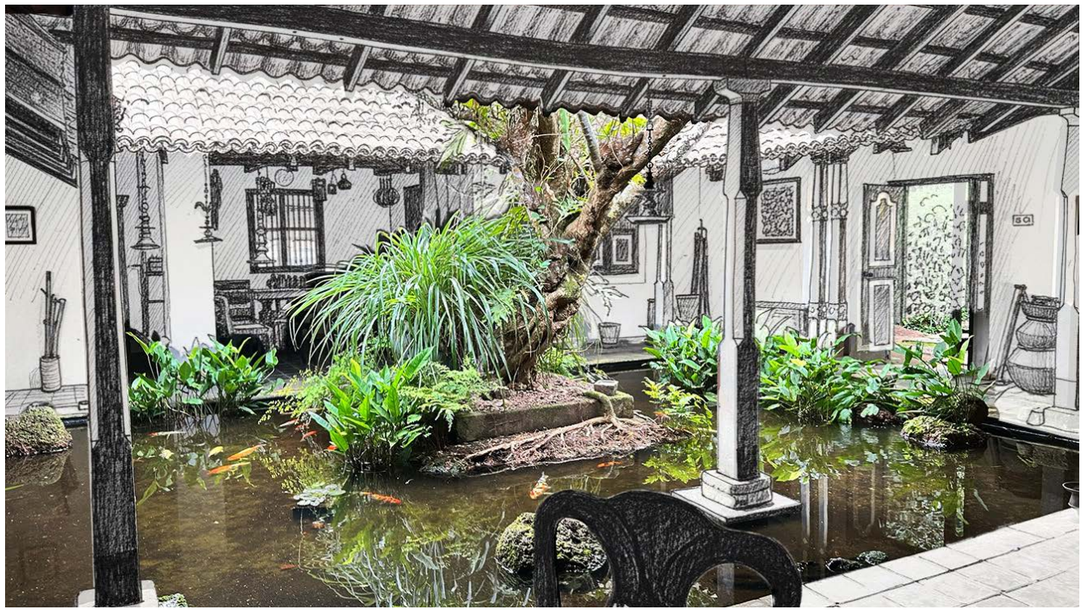
Heritance Kandalama
1994

The built form sits on terrain such that it almost becomes invisible as it ***integrates*** seamlessly. As one moves through the terraces one continues to enter the green. At each step the terraces turn and one discovers a new experience. Corridors stretch along the cliff edge, making walking a slow, continuous dialogue between built form and forest.



Dambulla Caves
1st-3rd Century BCE

Here, water creates pauses embedded within ritual and power. Where water is placed, stopping feels inevitable. The body responds instinctively—slowing down, turning inward, and becoming aware of the present moment.



Vijitha Basnayake House

The shade it attracts encourage people to linger. Pausing here is ***informal and domestic***. One stops to rest, to talk, to wash, or simply to sit. Water quietly anchors everyday life, turning routine moments into extended pauses.

Dambulla Caves
1st-3rd Century BCE

After climbing 300-350 on the difficult terrain stone platforms and shaded edges around trees become places to sit, wait, and reflect.

Seema Malaka
1978

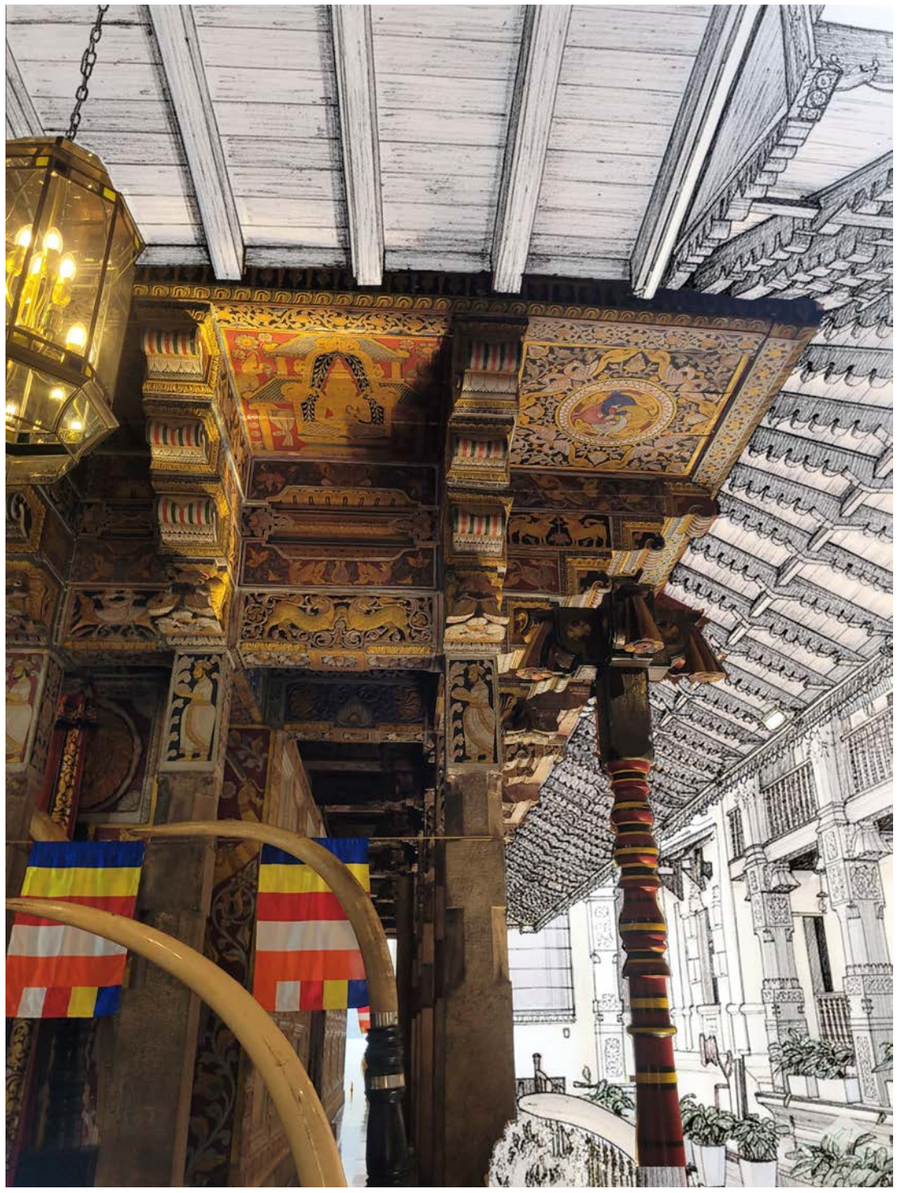
At Seema Malaka, similar platforms are seen floating on water allow quiet observation and informal gathering, turning pause into a social and meditative ***act***.

Ruwanweli Maha Seya, Annuradhapura
4th Century BCE

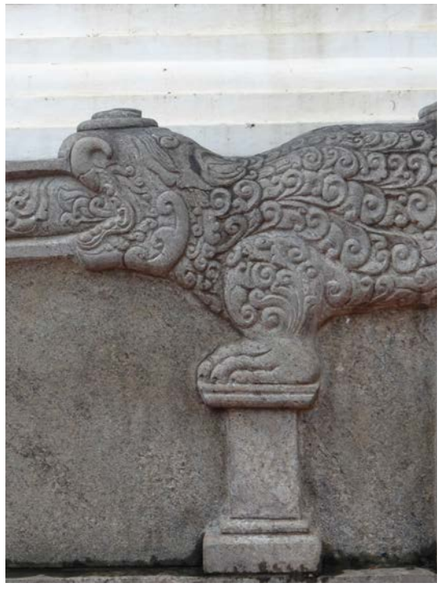
Mythological figures from myths and legends carved on marble were seen on columns and walls. Carvings with such ***intricacies*** forces one to stop and notice these.

Tooth Relic Temple, Kandy
16th Century AD

The ***decorated*** columns and ceilings draws all the attention. One is forced to stop and look at these carvings and paintings.



LOOKING



Anuradhapura
4th Century BCE

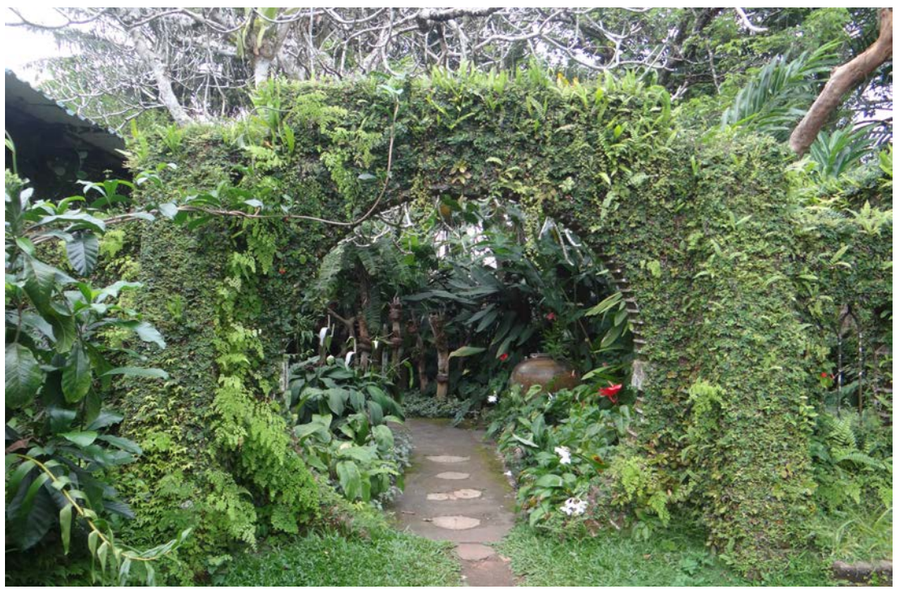
Sculptures resembling animals and figures both real and imagines with floral decorations ***divert*** attention elephant, a figure (possibly a gana dwarf attendant), a mythical crocodile-like creature (makara), and a gajasimha (elephant-lion hybrid) base of palace steps or guardstones as a symbol of prosperity and a guardian.

Brief Gardens, Bentota
1929

A whole range of anthropomorphic pots and weird and wonderful heads, mythological figures, a tranquil water feature surrounded by lush tropical plants create ***moments*** of visual rest or surprise. These pieces do not merely serve as decorative additions but act as focal points that punctuate the garden's flow.

Annuradhapura
4th Century BCE

Bricks have turned green. This shows the integration of moss and built form. Architecture accepts decay as part of its life, allowing time, climate, and growth to complete the design.



Brief Gardens and Heritance Kandalama
1929 and 1994

These images show the attempt to integrate environment into the built forms. In Bevis Bawa garden, he tries to curate the landscape in a manner that built is merely visible. Similarly, in Kandalama, Bawa adds a separate layer of scaffolding only for plants to grow. The buildings blends in the surroundings so well that it almost becomes invisible.